



Gábor Vermes

HUNGARIAN CULTURE AND POLITICS

IN THE HABSBURG MONARCHY, 1711–1848

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*Hungarian Culture
and Politics in the
Habsburg Monarchy,
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GÁBOR VERMES



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224 West 57th Street, New York NY 10019, USA
Tel: +1-212-547-6932
Fax: +1-646-557-2416
E-mail: martin.greenwald@opensocietyfoundations.org

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Acknowledgments

During the first part of my academic career, I worked on a biography of Count István Tisza and other topics during the era of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918). This work sparked my interest in the antecedents of both conservatism and liberalism, as well as Hungarian nationalism. So, I decided to focus on the Hungarian Age of Reform.

I arrived in Budapest in 1991 with a Fulbright Research Fellowship, planning to explore mainly the 1830s and 1840s. I consulted colleagues at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as well as others who were working elsewhere. Conversations with these scholars, some of whom became friends in time, were always a pleasurable and fruitful experience for me. Sadly, a few of them did not live to see the publication of this book.

While researching the 1830s and 1840s during my Fulbright grant period and in subsequent summers, I came to realize that this critical period in Hungarian history could not be understood unless I went back further in time and followed the evolution of multiple social, political, intellectual, and cultural trends. This realization compelled me to familiarize myself with a much longer period of Hungarian history than I had ever previously studied in depth. The result was an exciting, if long, period of discovery which enabled me to unravel a series of complexities, which demystified the Age of Reform for me and made me question some deeply entrenched views about it.

Drowning in material and always mindful of the passage of time, I needed associates at the National Széchényi Library. I was very fortunate in finding János Fehér, a recent graduate of the university, who was indispensable in helping me with my research and whose friendship I cherish to this day. After returning to the United States, I continued to need research associates, and I luckily found reliable and good ones in Ádám Dombóvári, Zsuzsa Kiss, Judit Klement, Anikó Macher, Rozália Márkus, András Oross, Márta Sarolta Viola, and Orsolya Völgyesi. I am most grateful to all of them.

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As with my first book on István Tisza, the patience and love of my wife, Ann Fagan, has sustained me through all the ups and downs, including multiple medical crises. She knew more about István Tisza and now knows more about Hungary's Age of Reform than any other native-born American, and my gratitude to her knows no bounds.

Introduction

The question of how to define “culture” has produced an immense number of answers and interpretations. To Raymond Williams, “the concept is among the two or three most complicated words in the English language,” and Peter Burke, after registering two hundred definitions, concluded that “there is no agreement about what constitutes culture.”¹ Indeed, the treatment of this concept has become an interdisciplinary matter. Anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians have offered different definitions, as have scholars whose views have been influenced by particular ideologies. For instance, anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz or Marshall Sahlins have emphasized the importance of symbols in their definitions of culture. Interpretations by Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson illustrate a different ideological emphasis. While both of them were Marxists, Williams characterized culture as “a whole way of life,” but Thompson defined it as “a whole way of struggle.”²

In Germany, *Kultur* acquired an elitist meaning of refinement, but it has been widely agreed that the scope of culture is and should be broader. Particular definitions usually encompass multiple aspects of society, manners, customs, attitudes, politics, and even economics. T.C.W. Blanning used a definition by Sir Edward Tylor, dating back to 1871, which declared culture to be “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Most subsequent definitions are variations on this basic theme. As far as the connection between politics and culture is concerned, “politics is an aspect of the overall cultural system,” George Schöppflin has written, also stating that “every political action is embedded in a wider cultural context.” In Lynn Hunt’s opinion, “the chief accomplishment of the French Revolution was the institution of a dramatically new political culture.”

1 Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London, 1976), 76; Peter Burke, *Variations of Cultural Histories* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 1.

2 Quoted in Peter Brooker, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London, 2003), 60.

Politics is inseparable from power, and Blanning made this explicit in the title of one of his books, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*, which is, in the author's words, "a comparative study of the development of political culture in Europe from the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth."³

Carolyn Steedman made a turn to study culture without abandoning her previous preoccupation with social history, a move that Geoff Eley admires. In fact, he thought that the dichotomy between the "social" and the "cultural" was false. Even in economic history, apart from material conditions and technological changes, cultural factors have been critical. As Joel Mokyr has pointed out, "culture determines preferences and priorities." The industrial revolution in Britain could not have achieved its spectacular triumphs without the preceding and contemporaneous scientific culture. In other words, "the beginnings of modern economic growth depended a great deal on what people knew and believed, and how those beliefs affected their economic behavior."⁴

Eley makes a plea for "basic pluralism," for "the possibility of grasping society as a whole." However, squeezing every possible social phenomenon into cultural rubrics carries the danger of watering down the concept to meaninglessness. This can be avoided if we use the term "instrumental value," referring to a given culture and its values as a "voluntary acceptance," a recognition that people positively desire a given culture and its values, according to Yael Tamir. This approach stresses the emotional wish of wanting to belong to a certain culture and showing a decisive preference for a given experience or way of life. The emotions in question are not necessarily positive; they could be fear and anxiety, emotions that Elemér Hankiss emphasized in his book, *Fears and Symbols*. Zoltán Fejős, another Hungarian scholar,

3 T.C.W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2002), 4; George Schöpplin, "The functions of myth and taxonomy of myths" in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpplin (eds.), *Myth and Nationhood* (London, 1997), 27; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), 15; Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*, 2.

4 Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008), 180–1; Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton, MA, 2002), 18, 40–1; Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1850* (New Haven, CT, 2009), 1.

following the model proposed by Howard Marc Ross, stressed the subjective consciousness of participants in given cultures, using Ross's term "psycho-cultural."⁵ A working definition of culture or subculture for an individual or a group can simply denote being emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually comfortable in a given social environment.

To approach the history of Hungary from this angle does not negate conventional analysis and narrative. What it should do is to add another dimension by situating people of past centuries in their appropriate cultural milieus. This, in turn, makes their intentions and actions more explicable.

"The essential problem for cultural historians today is how to resist fragmentation without returning to the misleading assumptions of the homogeneity of a given society or period," Peter Burke has stated.⁶ Degrees of unity or fragmentation, which have inevitably been the natural consequences of historical developments, vary widely. Relative homogeneity characterized the culture of medieval societies. What has been astonishing in Hungary is how strongly the attachment to a "sense of permanence" persisted in later centuries, giving conservatism its most powerful emotional and psychological support. Classicism, the cultivation of the ancients, which was deeply entrenched in churches, schools, and the legal system, was a powerful means of venerating the past and perpetuating it into the present. Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, were also guardians of conservative values, although, as communities, they were representing two somewhat different subcultures.

Certain sub-cultures acted, on occasion, at cross purposes with one another. While Christianity and Classicism stressed brotherly love and harmony, the culture of litigation inflamed hatreds and discords.

5 Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 200–1; Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, MA, 1993), 36; Elemér Hankiss, *Fears and Symbols* (Budapest, 2001; first published in Hungarian in 1999); Zoltán Fejős, "Az etnikai konfliktusok kulturális magyarázata. Mozaikok a 'kultúra' viszontagságos sorsához" [The cultural explanation of ethnic conflicts: Mosaics in the eventful fate of "culture"] in Tuomo Lahdelma, József Jankovics, Judit Nyerges, and Petteri Laihonon (eds.), *Power and Culture: Lectures at the Fifth International Congress of Hungarian Studies* (Jyväskylä, 2002), 44–5.

6 Burke, *Variations of Cultural Histories*, 201.

Baroque exuberance was also at variance with the classical ideas of harmony, poise, and balance.

My understanding recognizes that it is possible to inhabit, to feel comfortable in more than one sub-culture at various times, depending on specific circumstances. Lawrence Rosen was undeniably correct when he wrote that “as Thoreau said of people generally each man’s life is a mass of contradictions. It would be folly to attempt to reduce any culture to a pristine set of logically consistent propositions.”⁷

My cultural interpretation of Hungarian history in the Habsburg Monarchy covers the period lasting from 1711 to 1848. I chose 1711, because, following the defeat of the Rákóczi Rebellion in that year, against what many, though not all, Hungarians had viewed as the alien and hostile dynasty of the Habsburgs, a new period of reconciliation between the dynasty and the nobility, the ruling estate in feudal Hungary, began. This reconciliation and long co-existence until 1918, lasting in various forms with only one brief interruption during the Hungarian War of Independence in 1849, was never easy and, indeed, was always fraught with mutual distrust and incomprehension, in large part because of the steep cultural chasm that divided the Habsburgs and their Hungarian subjects.

The purpose of my book is to trace these cultural trends, some of them lasting, others intermittent, and their impact on one another. The consequences of their effects can be evaluated through the study of institutions and historical events and also through examination of the personalities of subsequent periods. Those cultural trends were also significant in the formation of personal opinions, attitudes, and behavioral patterns. In the last analysis, I am, as a historian, most interested in these personal human connections and their impact on society and politics.

7 Lawrence Rosen, *The Culture of Islam: Changing Aspects of Contemporary Muslim Life* (Chicago, 2002), 122.

CHAPTER 1

A Portrait of 18th Century Hungary

THE COUNTRY

Historians often abandon literal centennial divisions and, instead, find it more meaningful to denote the ending of one century and beginning of the next by using dates which make more historical sense than the customary demarcation lines. For example, the years of the Rákóczi Rebellion between 1703 and 1711 truly belong to the previous century, when wars, including Imre Thököly's anti-Habsburg campaigns, were still common. A prolonged period of peace and reconciliation with the Habsburg dynasty, the salient characteristics of eighteenth century Hungary, commenced only after 1711, when the Habsburg Monarchy—more precisely, the part of the Holy Roman Empire under direct Habsburg control—reached its maximum territorial extent.¹ Both Lombardy and the Spanish Low Countries represented valuable additions to Austria proper and Bohemia. The same cannot be said of other new acquisitions, the poor provinces of Galicia and Bukovina, although their poverty was probably no worse than it was in certain parts of Eastern Hungary. This kingdom encompassed the Carpathian Basin, with Transylvania in the east, the Great Plain in the center, Transdanubia in the west, Upper Hungary in the north, and the so-called annexed parts, Croatia–Slavonia, in the south.

Hungary in its entirety constituted a large territory within the Monarchy. As a result of centuries of neglect, the devastation caused by wars, and the Ottoman Empire's occupation of much of the country,

1 A good case can be made that Hungary was part of the Habsburg Empire, especially after 1804, when the Holy Roman Empire ceased to exist. However, the prevailing Hungarian view, which became dominant by the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, was succinctly expressed by József Irinyi, a young liberal in the 1840s. "Hungary," wrote Irinyi, "is part of the Habsburg Monarchy but not part of the Habsburg Empire, because it is a separate kingdom." Quoted in István Fenyő (ed.), *József Irinyi. Német-, francia- és angolszásági útijegyzetek* [Itinerary through Germany, France, and England] (Budapest, 1998), 235.

Hungary's population was low at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This was especially true in the Great Plain, where extensive deforestation and untamed rivers and creeks resulted in often impassable marshlands.

Warnings were frequently issued in Austria to travelers who were brave enough to face the inevitable hardships that a journey to Hungary entailed. While these warnings were partially justified by the harsh realities there, they were also symptomatic of the deep and mutual mistrust that underlay Austro-Hungarian relations beneath the veil of a jointly shared dynasty and innumerable common ties.² Although Pozsony (Pressburg, Bratislava) was Hungary's capital only until the mid-1780s, it remained, with few exceptions, the seat of diets until 1848. Pozsony was only a short ride from Vienna, and its more prosperous inhabitants tried very hard to duplicate the imperial capital's comforts. It is no cause for wonder that many travelers preferred to get marooned in Pozsony.

Those who did venture beyond that city were astonished by the vast differences between various regions of Hungary. Territories in the western and northern parts of the country were only intermittently damaged during past wars, because they had been under Habsburg rule since the sixteenth century. These places contained arable, well-cultivated lands, and, apart from poor hilly regions, prosperous trading towns and profitable gold, silver, and copper mines. In contrast, in the central, eastern, and southern territories, recaptured from the Turks,

- 2 No less a person than Prince Eugene de Savoy admonished Mary Wortley Montague, wife of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, who was about to cross Hungary on her way to Istanbul in 1717. Prince Eugene warned her that she would not find shelter anywhere, nor would she meet any person along the long stretch between Buda and Eszék. Others added that she and her retinue would be buried under snow or captured by the Tatars, who regularly plundered Hungary. Mary Montague went ahead anyway and suffered no exceptional hardships. "I can barely refrain from laughing," she wrote in a letter, "when I think of the terrifying tales I was told." However, she did also state, "There is nothing sadder in the world than traveling in Hungary with the knowledge of how flourishing this country once was." Katalin G. Györfy, *Kultúra és életforma a XVIII. századi Magyarországon (Idegen utazók megfigyelései)* [Culture and way of life in 18th century Hungary: Observations of foreign travelers] (Budapest, 1991), 17; Domokos Kosáry, *Újjáépítés és polgárosodás* [Restoration and bourgeois progress] (Budapest, 1990), 35; hereafter cited as Kosáry.

as the ethnically-mixed population of the Ottoman Empire has been popularly called, scarcity of population coincided with abject poverty and low economic productivity. Roads in these parts of Hungary, if they existed at all, were characterized by medieval conditions. They were impassable for most of the year, because filling materials were simply piled atop one another. In fact, the entire country had only two paved roads, both built and maintained by the central government. Nor was crossing rivers an easy matter, especially not during winters when the makeshift pontoon bridges had to be dismantled.³

The Habsburg dynasty, after defeating the Rákóczi Rebellion, repossessed a largely devastated land with a unique social and political constellation, but the Crown did not initiate reprisals. Many high officials in Vienna were inclined to view Hungarians as ungrateful, unreliable, recalcitrant, and disloyal subjects.⁴ On the other hand, the new king, Charles III, also the Holy Roman Emperor as Charles VI (1711–40), who had been suddenly recalled from Spain upon his brother's death in 1711, did not dislike Hungarians. In addition, Charles found the international situation favorable for his maneuvers to reconcile with erstwhile enemies. The fact that the savagery, so universal in seventeenth century Europe, was gradually losing some of its most brutal edges as Charles came to power, also helped him to carry out this policy.

Co-existence between the still-proclaimed royal absolutism and the autonomy of the noble-led counties in Hungary was anything but smooth. Although the king increased the power of the Crown through

3 Count Johann von Hofmannsegg described what it meant to cross the Danube in boats during the winter months. It involved skilled navigation between and around slabs of ice. "At home [in Saxony]," wrote Hofmannsegg, "few people would embark on such a journey, but here they do it just to go to a dance." János Poór, "Gróf Hofmannsegg utazása a XVIII. századvégi Magyarországon" [Count Hofmannsegg's journey at the end of the 18th century], *Budapesti Negyed* 2, no. 2 (1994), 64.

4 Queen Maria Theresa admitted in her Political Testament that primarily Austrian but also Bohemian officials oppressed Hungarians—naturally before her reign. This, in turn, created a great deal of ill will. "This animosity the Hungarians especially experienced," the queen wrote, "since the others sought to keep them in permanent subjugation and to prevent them from holding office. The apparent pretext for such an oppression was the unrest and rebellion in Hungary..." Quoted in Karl A. Roider (ed.), *Maria Theresa* (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), 36.

a host of administrative reforms, he did not restore the full-fledged absolutism of the 1670s. Rather, it was incompletely resurrected, thereby sowing the seeds of future discordances. Edicts, laws, and institutional arrangements did lock the court and the nobles into fixed and rigidly circumscribed positions *vis-à-vis* one another. Relations between them were uneasy at best and turbulent at worst.

It could not have been otherwise between those attached to the two irreconcilable principles of absolutism and autonomy. Although Habsburg absolutism in its relatively benign form was a regime based more on manipulation than coercion, with abundant opportunities for evasions, it was nevertheless antithetical to Hungary's system of institutionalized decentralization. This coexistence was often in flux, a constantly changing kaleidoscope of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the opposing parties. At the same time, mutual self-interest prevented either party from employing extreme measures that would have irreparably ruptured their uncomfortable coexistence.

The tension arising from this structural situation was similar to the tension generated between the court and various other autonomous institutions throughout the Habsburg realm. This particular tension in Hungary was qualitatively different from similar situations under the dynasty, because the self-perception of Hungarian nobles was such an assertive one. They regarded themselves as the ideal and proud embodiment of their country's historically-grounded independence, a sentiment which became increasingly pronounced during the eighteenth century. In addition, the Hungarian nobility insisted that its rulers undergo the investiture of solemn crowning as monarchs of Hungary, which signified for the country's nobles an unbroken line of historical continuity going all the way back to St. Stephen, the first Christian king of Hungary.

Although conditions in the country did marginally improve by the second half of the eighteenth century, poverty was still endemic for the most part. The Belgian Jesuit, Francois-Xavier de Feller, travelled widely in Hungary in the 1760s. He enjoyed the natural beauty and relative comfort of northern towns, characterizing his one-year stay in Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica) as "one of the happiest in my life." However, he had dismal experiences when he traveled in the Great Plain. De Feller, foreseeing potential in the region, could write nothing positive about it in the present. His descriptions painted the land as lacking even a modicum of civilization, with neglect everywhere apparent. He

noted that poverty afflicted not only the peasants, but also the nobles who were living “shabbily.” De Feller could in the end imagine no more desolate place in the world than Hungary’s Great Plain.

While it is possible to attribute some of this harsh opinion to de Feller’s refined Walloon sensibilities, his basic facts cannot be disputed. Others, when writing about Hungary, reached absurd conclusions. Louis de Jaucourt, the same author who identified the Hungarian language as a “dialect of Slavic,” quoted Voltaire’s description of Hungary as “almost nothing more than a vast desert” from the eighth volume of the *Encyclopedie*. Voltaire himself had never visited Hungary, but he apparently had no problem with converting a partial truth about a country in Eastern Europe into indiscriminate condemnation, thus illustrating the low esteem in which Hungary and other Eastern European countries were regarded by educated people in the west.⁵

Other personal experiences reinforced the country’s negative reputation. De Feller characterized the rather deplorable state of inns along the roads and in small towns as dirty and poor, inundated by all kinds of insects. This impression was shared by the British geologist, Robert Townson, who travelled in Hungary in 1793. All he could obtain in one inn was dry bread and sour wine. Another inn in Tokaj was so dreadful that the director of the royal salt mines personally rescued him and gave him shelter in his own house. As a result, travel in Hungary, whether by foreigners or by Hungarians themselves, was rather limited. Not even the noblemen’s love of politicking could induce more than a fraction of them to attend their county assemblies. The inns were mostly used by unsuspecting foreigners, because travelling Hungarians either stayed inside their vehicles or looked for hospitable private homes.⁶

The continuously strained state of imperial/royal finances prevented Vienna from investing much in the country’s infrastructure, a project also endangered by the active resistance against or passive indiffer-

5 Géza Birkás, “Francia utazók Magyarországon” [French travelers in Hungary], *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis Philosophica* 16 (1948), 84, 86; quoted in Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map on the Civilization of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994), 186.

6 Birkás, “Francia utazók Magyarországon,” 88; Robert Townson, *Travels in Hungary* (London, 1797), 261; Gyula Antalfy, *A honi utazás története* [The history of domestic travel] (Budapest, 1943), 144–5; G.F. Cushing, “Travel in 18th century Hungary,” *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok* 6 (1972), 60.

ence of the Hungarian counties to the Crown's policies. At the same time, administrative, economic, and military considerations made it imperative for Hungary to become part of a Monarchy-wide network of communication, at least on a minimal level. In 1749, a postal service was set up for the entire Monarchy. The center of mail service in Hungary was located in Buda, the starting point of eight main lines of delivery. Regular mail covered 454 miles with 165 post offices. Starting in 1750, a so-called quick mail service was established between Vienna and Buda, as well as between Vienna and Pozsony, on a daily round-trip basis.⁷

The court was also determined to reverse Hungary's demographic predicament. Self-interest, rather than altruism, was the principal motive. A depopulated and impoverished kingdom would have continued to be a shrinking tax base, as well as a drag on the more prosperous parts of the Habsburg lands. According to the 1784 census, the kingdom of Hungary's population accounted for 43.4% of the Monarchy's total population of 23 million, a sure sign of intervention during the preceding decades.⁸

Apart from Slovak peasants, who moved from one part of the country to another, others, including Germans, Serbs, and Romanians, were either invited or allowed to settle in large numbers. The consequences of this demographic shift were momentous, making Hungary into an even more multi-ethnic country than it had been during the Middle Ages. By the end of the eighteenth century, Hungarians had become, in relation to the combined number of all the non-Hungarian minorities, a minority in their own country.

Agriculture was dominant in eighteenth century Hungary. The peasants, who constituted over 90% of the total population, were engaged in it, along with those petty noblemen whom poverty compelled to work on the land. The vast majority of the peasantry labored in bondage as serfs, renting plots from their landlords and also working on the manorial lands for free. The landowners' incentive to do rational farming, already widespread in England and the Netherlands, was mini-

7 Miklós Kamody, "Levelezés és utazás Kazinczy Ferenc korában" [Correspondence and travel in the age of Ferenc Kazinczy], *Széphalom* 2 (1989), 34–5; Poór, "Grof Hofmannsegg utazása," 57.

8 "Up to a point, but most of the rise was unplanned movement or the result of local increase." Letter of R.J.W. Evans to the author, August 13, 2008.

mal or non-existent. Living in isolated areas, far from commercial opportunities and ignorant about, if not contemptuous of, innovations, many landowners produced only as much as they and their families needed. The primitive level of agricultural technology resulted in products that were usually low in quantity and poor in quality. Nor was productivity on lands producing for markets necessarily higher, because it was often achieved by expanding the manorial lands or adding more compulsory hours to the robot, the serfs' free labor. Either way, growth of output was usually accomplished not by improving farming methods, but by more severely exploiting the serfs. Gergely Berzeviczy, enlightened nobleman and economist, wrote that better cultivated lands in Hungary still fell woefully short of their counterparts in England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. "Even if just one county, the county of Bihar, lived up to its potential," Berzeviczy noted wistfully, "it could easily provide for the whole country."⁹

The robot was by far the most onerous obligation, performed regularly two or three days a week and increased to four, five, six days a week in times of plowing, sowing, and the harvest. Cottars' obligations were somewhat less.¹⁰ In addition, serfs were frequently coerced by the county administrations to do various public works. During the eighteenth century, these administrations engaged in a growing competition with individual landowners, each attempting to enhance its share of control over the villages.¹¹ The serfs also owed taxes to the state and their respective churches.

Only about three to four per cent of the peasants were exempt from discharging these obligations. They were descendants of the Hajduks, shepherds turned soldiers who had been granted freedom in the early seventeenth century, as well as descendants of the Jász (Ias) of Iranian origin and of the turcic Kun (Cumans), who had settled in Hungary in the thirteenth century and received autonomous rights.

Agricultural production varied by region. In Transdanubia, wheat and corn were the leading crops. The vast expanse of the Great Plain made animal husbandry there both possible and profitable. In the course of the eighteenth century, animals became Hungary's primary

9 Gregor von Berzeviczy, *Ungarns Industrie und Kommerz* (Weimar, 1802), 11.

10 Letter of R.J.W. Evans to the author, August 13, 2008.

11 István Szabó, *Tanulmányok a parasztság történetéből* [Studies on the history of the peasantry] (Budapest, 1948), 300.

export, and, by the last years of the century, the export of wool was making it lucrative to raise sheep.

While labor shortages during the first part of the century had facilitated the serfs' mobility, it was in the landowners' interest to stop this and to keep the serfs firmly tied to the land. Starting around 1740, growing restrictions accompanied the steady whittling down of concessions earlier granted to the serfs in relatively freer times. Hardest hit were the poorer serfs, in contrast to the somewhat better-off ones with hereditary rights over lands rented from their landowners.

Bitter letters written by or on behalf of serfs, imploring Queen Maria Theresa (1740–80) to alleviate their misery, reached the Habsburg court.¹² One, written in 1765, complained of multiple “dreadful burdens that plague us.” Not all approaches were peaceful. Serfs rose up and wreaked havoc in certain localities, including the Great Plain in 1735 and 1753, in Zala County in 1765, and near Buda in 1766, foreshadowing the bloodiest of them all in Transylvania in the 1780s.

These disturbances certainly contributed to the queen's decision to regulate the serf–landlord relationship. Other likely motives included the queen's Christian concern for the serfs and a desire to secure the flow of cheap food supply from Hungary. The Urbarial Patent of 1767, which applied only to the 43 counties of Hungary proper, determined the size of the plots rented to the serfs and also established a ceiling on their obligations. Resistance to these measures was intense among the landowners who fought them with various evasions and subterfuges, a situation which continued under Joseph II (1780–90), who reinforced his mother's Patent with additional edicts of his own in 1785. These reforms were no doubt beneficial to the serfs, but the landlords' control over the Hungarian counties made their implementation uncertain and often minimal.

Most villages had a church, a schoolhouse, a village hall, an inn, and a mill or mills. The latter, unlike most of the schools, were built of solid materials. The church was situated at the highest point or sometimes at one end of or even outside the village. Relatively prosperous villages had churches built of stone, while churches in poor villages were built of wood or unfired, sun-dried bricks. The second most prominent building in most villages was the inn, which also functioned as a store and

12 Éva H. Balázs (ed.), *Jobbágylevelek* [Letters by serfs] (Budapest, 1951), 218.

the meeting place for young people. Having a village hall represented a higher level of status that not all villages possessed.¹³

Only if improvements in rural conditions could be closely linked to growth in trade and industry, mostly handicraft in nature, would Hungary even start on the long road of catching up with economically and socially more advanced countries. This growth could take place only in towns. Hardly anyone in the traditional society of eighteenth century Hungary recognized this, nor was the predominantly agricultural economy poised to embark on constructive reforms. Yet, Hungarian towns were not uniformly hostile to changes, though those changes were sporadic at best.

A new brand of merchant and artisan entrepreneurs did exist, but these people confronted the much larger, deeply rooted, and conservative establishment of the guilds, although eighteenth century guilds were less entrenched than they eventually became in the nineteenth century. Masters and journeymen worked together in many guilds, albeit usually not without frictions. At the same time, scarcity of markets and the dearth of technological advances left a significant portion of the masters working alone in their shops. Guilds, to protect their income, attempted to monopolize their own local markets, but the purchasing power of their rural and urban customers was frequently too low to allow for a healthy development of handicraft industries in the towns.

Manufacturing industry existed only in traces, mostly in textile, paper, and tobacco, but it remained relatively insignificant, certainly in comparison to the guild economy. Mining, concentrated in Upper Hungary, presented an exception. Vienna actively supported the mining of precious metals, especially gold and silver, and control over their production was a royal monopoly. Copper, tin, and iron were also mined, and the extraction of these minerals was generally done in accordance with the most advanced technological standards.¹⁴

Bad roads and unnavigable rivers did hinder domestic commerce which, inasmuch as it existed, centered around fairs in certain towns. Some of those fairs, especially those in Pest and Debrecen, attracted

13 Kálmán Eperjessy, *A magyar falu története* [The history of the Hungarian village] (Budapest, 1966), 90–1.

14 János Barta, Jr., *A tizennyolcadik század története* [The history of the eighteenth century] (Budapest, 2000), 89–93; hereafter cited as Barta.

significant numbers of people. Foreign trade was growing as the century was coming to a close. In fact, Hungary's balance of trade was positive, as the value of exports in cattle, cereal, wine, and others was higher than the value of imported industrial goods. The annexation of the seaport, Fiume, to Hungary in 1779 as *corpus separatum* further boosted foreign trade, though the movement of goods leaving from and arriving to Hungary still took place across the western frontier, rather than by the sea via Fiume.¹⁵

Hungary had two types of towns during the eighteenth century. The free royal towns, over which the monarch exercised direct control, had 442,000 inhabitants, or 5.6% of the total population in 1787. Privileged groups in these towns, who enjoyed full civil rights, were entitled to send delegates to the diets. Although royal towns did have a degree of autonomy, the monarch confirmed the town officials, and the royal bureaucracy kept a watchful eye over their economies. The second and more populous kind of towns were the market towns, boasting over 1,600,000 inhabitants in 1787.

While the court was motivated to collect more taxes and augment the number of free royal towns under its direct control, members of the nobility, perceiving any gain for Vienna as their loss, opposed this trend. The Catholic Church, usually closely allied to Vienna, often appeared on the nobility's side on this issue, because prelates could also own market towns. Pécs, for instance, became a free royal town in 1780 over the local bishop's vehement protest, while ecclesiastic resistance in Eger proved to be so successful that the town's status as a market town never changed.

Secular and ecclesiastic landowners alike owned and controlled market towns, although their inhabitants were frequently eager to spring free of this control by paying a lump sum for their freedom. Although their rate of success varied and some did not succeed at all, inhabitants of market towns did enjoy a larger measure of autonomy than was the case with the royal towns. In both categories and especially in the market towns, the lines between town and village were blurred. Many townspeople were in fact peasants, and even many artisans were engaged in agriculture at least part of the time.

Some of the large towns in the Great Plain were simply overgrown peasant villages. In contrast, the mining towns of northern Hungary

15 Ibid., 94–5.

preserved their urban character the most. By the end of the eighteenth century, roughly one quarter of the total population lived in towns. However, precisely because so many of these townspeople engaged in agriculture, the percentage of genuine burghers was much lower, a mere 1.5–2%, according to one estimate.¹⁶

Pozsony remained the country's capital for most of the century. A historic town at Hungary's westernmost edge, Pozsony was ideally suited to project both Habsburg power and the power of the Catholic Church, because most of its significant buildings belonged to one or the other. The royal palace received major renovations under Maria Theresa, and the coronation church was the site where several of Hungary's monarchs were crowned. Although most of the town's inhabitants spoke German as their mother tongue, quite a few Hungarian aristocratic families embarked on building baroque palaces along "Long Street." Prosperous burgher families, both German and Hungarian, followed suit with their elegant mansions. Outside the limelight, the poor families of Pozsony lived in shabby and crowded dwellings on the large outskirts around the center of the town. There, houses were built of tiles of wood or mud, presenting terrible fire hazards, according to one German visitor.¹⁷

A description of another major town, Debrecen, in Eastern Hungary, illustrates how very different the country's towns could be from one another. Debrecen, a market center since the fourteenth century, was a characteristically large market town, originally owned by powerful landowners. Many inhabitants in the town were in fact peasants, who, by virtue of their living in town, had moved up a notch in the hierarchical scale from the serfs they had left behind in the neighboring villages. However, some peasants living in Debrecen remained serfs, even in their new surroundings. Nevertheless, the incentives of moving into town—better economic opportunities and a measure of greater personal freedom—were palpable.

The civic administration of Debrecen became so powerful that even the nobles who moved into the town had to submit to its authority. This

16 Kálmán Benda (ed.), *Emberbarát vagy hazafi? Tanulmányok a felvilágosodás korának magyarországi történetéből* [A humanist or a patriot? Studies from the history of the Age of Enlightenment in Hungary] (Budapest, 1978), 23.

17 László Aigner, *Pozsony* (Budapest, 1938), 15–33; István Hajnal, "Arndt magyar utazása 1798-ban" [Arndt's travel in Hungary in 1798], *Magyar Szemle* I, no. 4 (1927), 429.

power became even more pronounced after the control of landowners came to an end in 1618. The merchants constituted the upper crust in town. Beneath them were the more numerous but less prosperous artisans, organized in guilds, who formed the heart and soul of the citizenry and acquired the name *civis*, a term limited mostly but not exclusively to Debrecen. The chief magistrate and twelve senators, chosen from the ranks of the most affluent citizens, ran the town. Their verdicts could theoretically be challenged, but were usually not opposed in practice.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, Debrecen had become the vital center of Calvinism in Hungary. In the all-embracing tradition of this denomination, the town administration provided strong support to the church, and Debrecen's famous college upheld strict Calvinist standards. Not all inhabitants were citizens. For example, neither the journeymen in the guilds nor the serfs could claim this status.

In 1774 the community land outside the town, a medieval relic, was dissolved, enabling individuals to carve it up and own pieces of it. This move by enterprising individuals became desirable for reasons of both economics and prestige, but it did further widen economic disparities in the town. The Debrecen fairs, lasting two weeks and held six times a year, were quite popular. Only the fairs at Pest were better attended and deemed generally more spectacular.¹⁸

Pest and Buda, divided by the Danube, were still two separate towns, both of which demonstrated the sharp contrasts between badly neglected poor areas and gradually emerging new surroundings which were coming to yield a measure of comfort, at least to some people. When Robert Townson entered Buda in 1793, his first impressions were dismal. "The entrance into Buda," wrote Townson, "is the most un-favorable that can be conceived. There are no fortifications, no gates to this city, and you enter this metropolis of Hungary as you do one of its villages. ... The first thing that strikes you is poverty and filth." Townson also criticized public security as weak, especially during the nights, and he compared the shore along the Danube to a stinking garbage dump. He also observed that beggars were ubiquitous.¹⁹

Townson was not blind to positive developments. While he described the hospital maintained by the town administration of Pest as

18 István Balogh, *A civisek világa* [The world of the *civis*] (Budapest, 1973), 12–79.

19 Townson, *Travels in Hungary*, 76; József Götz, *Budapest története* [The history of Budapest] (Budapest, 1896), 143, 157, 158.

“the worst in Europe,” he praised the one operated by the university as excellent. He also found the university’s natural history collection and coffeehouses very good and the hot baths of Buda positively remarkable. Count Hofmannsegg, who visited Pest and Buda in the same year, was enthusiastic about Pest. “Many new houses are being built [in Pest],” he wrote, “and in time [it] could become a little Berlin, so spacious and broad are its streets and squares... and the coffee-house [at the floating bridge in Pest] is the most beautiful I have ever seen.” The majestic splendor of this particular coffeehouse attracted many foreign visitors.

Among them was the German poet and historian, Ernst Moritz Arndt. A few of his friends had supported his desire to visit Hungary, but many more had tried to discourage him by repeating misinformation. Not heeding their advice, Arndt came to Hungary in 1798, and enjoyed, by and large, a good time there. Like Hofmannsegg, he found the coffeehouse on the floating bridge astonishing, better than any coffeehouse he had seen in Germany or France. Arndt, delighting in the visual experiences and culinary excesses of his time in Buda and Pest, had warm feelings about both of these towns, even though not all of his observations about them were favorable.²⁰

Pest and Buda possessed totally different characteristics. Buda had been the traditional seat of power in Hungary from the Middle Ages until well into the sixteenth century. Once the advantages deriving from its central location within Hungary were recognized, Buda came again to house all the significant governmental offices, which were transferred there from Pozsony in 1784–85.

Buda, with its aura of tradition and a predominantly German population, with its rolling hills, forests, and beautiful views over the Danube River, appeared to be the right place for all the officials who arrived there. Although its population numbered 24,000 in 1787, three thousand more than those who lived in Pest during the same year, this surplus reflected the large number of officials living in Buda, rather than true urban growth.

In contrast, Pest, the westernmost extension of the Great Plain, did experience considerable urban growth in the eighteenth century, its

20 Townson, *Travels in Hungary*, 78, 79, 82, 83; Poór, “Gróf Hofmannsegg utazása,” 58; Hajnal, “Arndt magyar utazása,” 427; *ibid.*, II, no. 5 (1928), 95–6; *ibid.*, II, no. 6 (1928), 207.

population more than doubling between 1720 and 1777. Pest became the center of thriving commerce, accompanied by a dynamic and vibrant way of town life. In 1784 the university moved there from Buda, but what kept the vitality of Pest burning with such intensity were its fairs. Reaching out to Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia in the west, to the seaport of Fiume in the southwest, to Galicia in the east, and to the Ottoman-controlled Balkans to the south enabled Pest to flourish as a center of commerce, that is, as much as the country's backward communication system allowed. Townson happened to be in Pest during one of the quarterly fairs and found it a fascinating spectacle. This fair had become so congested by 1789 that the authorities had to find a new place for it.²¹

The increase of population in Pest was accompanied by a building boom. Housing for a growing number of people, as well as many palaces and churches in the baroque style, were being built. Architecture in Pest and Buda resembled Pozsony in reflecting the dominance of Catholics in all three towns, although a strong presence of Lutherans also characterized Pozsony. The eventual move of Jews and Protestants to Pest and Buda was, for years to come, gradual and only on a small scale. The Orthodox Serbs, on the other hand, moved into these two towns during the eighteenth century in relatively large numbers.

Óbuda, outside Buda, was a separate small town. Although Jews received permission to settle in both Pest and Buda in 1783, their numbers remained very small in both towns for the time being. In contrast, Jews in Óbuda were protected by the Zichy family, who had a large estate there. By 1785, this town had almost three hundred Jewish families.²²

THE PEOPLE

"God himself divided us," wrote Ferenc Faludi, the eighteenth century Jesuit writer, "between the serfs who do the work and are in need and the noblemen who enjoy abundance and the good life."²³ In reality, the divisions in Hungarian society were far from that simple and

21 Townson, *Travels in Hungary*, 86–8; Albert Gárdonyi, *A hétszázéves Budapest* [Budapest at seven hundred years] (Budapest, 1944), 90, 92.

22 László Gonda, *A zsidóság Magyarországon, 1526–1945* [Jews in Hungary, 1526–1945] (Budapest, 1992), 38.

23 Quoted in Barta, 95.

included, after all, relatively well-to-do serfs and extremely poor noblemen. Nevertheless, the world of hamlets and peasant huts was by and large self-contained, a world apart from the rest of society.

This reality was in part imposed by the circumstances that came to dominate the second half of the century, when a resurgence of the power by the landlords led to a more stringent set of multiple obligations. Not only were the serfs compelled to pay taxes to the state, but also they had to do so to the county, their churches, and, last but not least, their landowners. Moreover, the serfs had to provide the army with fresh recruits. The burden of these multiple obligations and the generally poor chances for the serfs to sell their surplus produce, if indeed they had any, could not but generate a sense of fatalism in them.

In an understandable response to the predicament in which the serfs found themselves, they came to view all outsiders with extreme suspicion and also clung to their deeply traditional ways of life. After all, the only modicum of security in the serfs' lives came from adhering to what was customary and familiar. This disposition remained firmly entrenched, even on the very rare occurrences when outsiders opened up new vistas to them.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, two agrarian reformers could attest to the strength of these attitudes. Sámuel Tessedik (Samuel Tešedík) was the scion of an artisan family, originally from Moravia. The son of a Lutheran pastor, the young Sámuel followed in his father's footsteps. After studying at the university in Erlangen, Tessedik was appointed pastor to the Lutheran congregation in Szarvas in Southeastern Hungary. Against all odds and against "hatred, envy, ridicule, persecution, and intrigues," to use his own words, Tessedik embarked on setting up a school in 1780, primarily for children from peasant and artisan families. The school combined the teaching of academic subjects with practical instruction in farming and handicraft. "It is so difficult to spread the most necessary and most indispensable information in the village," complained Tessedik, "they learn in the school everything, but what could help them best in everyday life."²⁴ Yet he continued pursuing his life's mission, which was to

24 Gábor Zsigmond (ed.), *Tessedik Sámuel és Berzeviczy Gergely a parasztok állapotáról Magyarországon* [Sámuel Tessedik and Gergely Berzeviczy on the condition of peasants in Hungary] (Budapest, 1979), 50; quoted in Dénes Penyigei, *Tessedik Sámuel* (Budapest, 1980), 244.

dispel ignorance, suspiciousness, and resistance to innovation among the peasants. Tessedik insisted on using this word, rather than the legally accurate but demeaning word “serfs.” It was nevertheless an implicit admission of failure that his establishment changed into a school for farm managers in 1799. The final blow came in 1806, when the school closed down altogether.

The second reformer, Ferenc Pethe, came from the petty nobility in Eastern Hungary’s Szabolcs County. After attending the Calvinist College in Debrecen, he continued his studies in the Netherlands and visited several countries in Western Europe. His interest lay in agriculture, and he found agrarian conditions in his own country woefully inadequate in comparison to what he had witnessed during his travels. Upon returning to Hungary, he founded an agricultural journal in 1796 in order to propagate much-needed changes. He sounded resigned and pessimistic in one of his articles. “Blind custom is the tyrant of the human race,” Pethe wrote. “Whoever denies this truth could also deny that fire is hot.” Indeed, his faltering journal ceased publication after only one year.²⁵

A frequent accusation leveled against the serfs was indolence. Pethe himself made this charge in 1805, writing that “when an Englishman works, he is on fire, when a Hungarian does so, he is asleep while working.” The explanation by Tamás Dobszay and Zoltán Fónagy was right on the mark; they both recognized that the serfs quite rightly surmised that the main result of their working harder would be subjection to even heavier taxes. The system, after all, was stacked against them in such a way as to exclude any system of rewards.

What sustained the serfs, apart from stubborn adherence to traditions, was the central role that their families and communities played in their lives. The family was the basic unit of both production and consumption, with roles assigned to family members according to age and gender. The community as a whole determined the norms of acceptable conduct, which were predictably bound by traditional customs.²⁶

The existence and importance of these communities did not, however, imply homogeneity. For example, somewhat better-off smallhold-

25 Sándor Süle, *Kisszánthói Pethe Ferenc* (Budapest, 1964), 64, 76.

26 Quoted in *ibid.*, 39; Tamás Dobszay and Zoltán Fónagy, “A rendi társadalom felbomlása” [The dissolution of feudal society] in András Gergely (ed.), *19. századi magyar történelem 1790–1918* [19th century Hungarian history 1790–1918] (Budapest, 1998), 98, 96–7.

ers were not the same as very poor landless serfs. The Scottish traveller, William Hunter, clearly ran into the latter in 1799. "Inside peasant houses, there was nothing like comfort," he wrote. "All was filth and dirt, men, women, and children, pigs, cows huddled together... the peasants were nasty with unruly hair. ... I often thought that, if I were emperor, one of my first acts would be the establishment of manufacturing combs and then acting to oblige my subjects to use them."²⁷ While this traveler's contempt is all too typical of the callous condescension of privileged Hungarians and travelers in Hungary, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of Hunter's observations.

During the course of the eighteenth century, a process of differentiation was taking place among the serfs, which resulted in the emergence of rich peasants who, possessing more animals and agricultural equipment, were able to exploit opportunities and gain more land by all possible means, including driving impoverished peasants off the land and creating enclosures. The successful peasants could become sufficiently affluent to discharge their obligation to use money for their obligation to do the robot, and they could even use poor peasants as their hired men. Tessedik's description of them as "vampires and despots" suggests that at least some of them could be as cruel to their fellow peasants as some of the landlords' managers undoubtedly were. Village mayors also came from the ranks of rich peasants, a position that carried both power and economic advantages. Usually, when ranch land was being redistributed, these rich peasants would arrange the process so that they would get the best pieces.²⁸

Serfs who had a contractual arrangement with their landowners also had an advantage. Usually those who had moved into the country as settlers, or who were the descendants of settlers, generally discharged their obligation to their landowners with money and produce, rather than their own labor. Their upper crust lived in manorial towns and entered into contracts with their landowners not as individuals, but through their town council. They were in fact, if not by law, free peasants, who were the most likely to experiment with new crops and produce for the market. Their advantages were, of course, not shared by

27 William Hunter, *Travels Through France, Turkey, and Hungary to Vienna in 1792 to Which Are Added Several Towns in Hungary in 1799 and 1800*, 2 volumes (London, 1803), 2: 225–6, 257–8.

28 Eperjessy, *A magyar falu története*, 146–7; quoted in Zsigmond, *Tessedik és Berzeviczy*, 144.

poor peasants living in manorial towns, whose misery was indistinguishable from the abject poverty of their counterparts whom they had left behind in their respective villages.²⁹

For some peasants in certain areas of the country, the only possible, but usually illusory way to escape utter misery was to become highwaymen. Still unsettled conditions in the Great Plain, in the southern frontier province of the Bánát, in Transdanubia's Bakony Mountains, and in Somogy County, with its own brand of animal husbandry, allowed herdsmen and peasants to live quite free from any kind of control. Runaway serfs had ample opportunities to hide in forests, marshes, and isolated ranches, and their wish and the wish of others on the margins of village or ranch life to escape poverty created a conducive environment for crime. Army deserters augmented their ranks mostly during the wars of the late eighteenth century. Throughout that century, in fact, no effective police authority in control of rural areas existed anywhere in the world.³⁰ Herdsmen were living under semi-nomadic conditions, and, among at least some of these herdsmen, the lines between herding cattle or stealing them, between treating travelling strangers with hospitality or robbing them could become blurred. The eighteenth century was the "golden age" of outlaws in Hungary, to the point that, when the number of robberies rose above a certain level, the authorities discontinued the postal service. The situation sometimes became so serious that military troops had to be called out to restore order.³¹

These young outlaws were not noble "Robin Hoods," but, rather, bandits who could be extremely brutal to whoever stood in their way, which included their fellow peasants on occasion. Setting fire to houses was their favorite method of settling scores, and betraying their leader was not unknown among them, either. Most of them were, in Kálmán Giday's words, "poor devils," who lived from stealing and were definitely no heroes, no avengers for all the suffering and humiliation afflicting the common people. Yet, at least some of them grew into that role in the popular mind, into symbols of freedom and defiance, the

29 Emil Niederhauser, *A jobbágyfelszabadítás Kelet-Európában* [The emancipation of serfs in Eastern Europe] (Budapest, 1962), 128–9.

30 Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York, 2000), 15.

31 Antalffy, *A honi utazás története*, 279–80.

embodiments of release from oppressive bondage. This was no isolated phenomenon in Hungary, as the legendary heroic outlaw status of Juraj Jánošík among the Slovak peasantry and of Grigore Pinteá among Romanians in Transylvania demonstrated. In Hungary, Bandi Angyal and Marci Zöld became famous early in the nineteenth century, when their embellished exploits were made public.³²

Those who lived in towns were often digging their own deep moats in order to exclude others, but the very nature of towns in eighteenth century Hungary impeded the desire of certain urban groups to remain completely exclusive. At a time when towns were losing some of their medieval characteristics, they were beginning to become towns without literal and figurative walls. The dominant guilds were led by masters, jealous of their privileges and often holding the line against journeymen who were eager to become masters themselves. Still, to the outside world, guilds presented fortresses of exclusiveness with their own sets of strict rules and regulations. Although the activities of the so-called *kontárok* (“bunglers”), who practiced their trade outside the purview of the guilds, often quite successfully by producing goods more cheaply, did not become significant until the first half of the nineteenth century, as harbingers of change already in the eighteenth century, they were gradually starting to undermine the rigid hierarchical structure of the guilds.

Furthermore, until the end of the century, the meagerness of domestic markets and price controls set by the authorities compelled artisans, especially in the manorial towns, to take up agriculture on the side. In many cases, no compulsion was necessary. The decision of people already close to the soil to buy arable land or a vineyard very likely corresponded with their innermost desires. This sideline activity in agriculture had the effect of slowing down the development of both particular trades and the towns themselves. So did the attempts of some merchants' associations to become exclusive by barring outsiders. For example, the association in Kassa (Košice), a large Northern Hungarian town, decided in 1772 not to allow anyone to open a new

32 Kálmán Giday, “A betyáretika” [The ethics of highwaymen], *Debreceni Szemle* 14, no. 10 (1940), 244; Ilona Dobos, *Paraszti szájhagyomány, városi szóbeliség* [The oral tradition of peasants and verbalism in towns] (Budapest, 1986), 148–9.

shop; sixteen years later, the number of merchants was still limited to only thirty-four people.³³

Armenians, Serbs, Greeks, and eventually, in growing numbers, Jews came to represent unacceptable competition to the merchants. Jews were accused of unfair trading practices, using false weights and measures, selling cheap or defective goods, and stealing. Apart from such thoroughly Hungarian towns as Debrecen, Kecskemét, and others in the Great Plain, most merchants and artisans were German-speaking descendants of medieval townsmen or of relatively recent settlers. They tried hard to exclude Jews from their respective towns.

Initially, most Jews arrived from the west, primarily settling in the manorial towns and villages of Transdanubia. Queen Maria Theresa, unfavorably disposed towards Jews, levied a special, so-called toleration tax on them in 1746. Most Jews were peddlers, although some owned shops, and others were artisans; in villages, they rented taverns and often had the right to distill brandy. Joseph II, in his edict of 1783, permitted them to settle down in free royal towns and to pursue a handicraft trade without infringing on the privileges of the guilds. He also allowed them to carry on their trading activities without restrictions. Nevertheless, some restrictions remained until 1840, especially in the northern mining towns. In Hungary and Transylvania together, Jews

33 László Ungár, "Szempontok a magyar polgári osztály kialakulásának vizsgálatához" [Viewpoints on the evolution of the Hungarian bourgeoisie], *Századok* 76, no. 2 (1942), 313; Géza Eperjessy, "Adalékok a mezőgazdaság és a falusi-városi kézműipar kapcsolatához az 1848 előtti Magyarországon" [Contributions to the connections between agriculture and the artisans in villages and towns in Hungary before 1848], *Agrártörténeti Szemle* 8, no. 4 (1966), 495; György Kerekes, *A kassai kereskedők életéből. Harmadfélszázad 1687–1913* [From the lives of merchants in Kassa between 1687 and 1913] (Budapest, 1913), 44, 49; Elemér Mályusz, "A magyarországi polgárság a francia forradalom korában" [The Hungarian bourgeoisie in the era of the French Revolution], *Bécsi Magyar Intézet Évkönyve* 1 (1931), 229–30, 234–5; János Kósa, "Magyar rendiség és osztálytársadalom" [Hungarian feudalism and class society], *Magyarástudomány* 1, no. 3 (1942), 355; Kállay, *Szabad királyi városok gazdálkodása*, 24–7; István Rácz, "Városlakó nemesek az Alföldön 1541–1848 között" [Noblemen in towns in the Great Plain between 1541 and 1848] in György Szabad (ed.), *A polgárosodás útján* [Towards bourgeois development] (Budapest, 1990), 21–2; Sándor Gyimesi, *Incomes, Public Constructions and Investments in Hungarian Towns in the 18th Century* (Budapest, 1980), 15; Zoltán Fallenbüchl, *Mária Terézia magyar hivatalnokai* [The Hungarian officials of Maria Theresa] (Budapest, 1989), 52.

numbered approximately 83,000 by 1772.³⁴ After the first partition of Poland in that year, Jews from the east also started to arrive in increasing numbers.

The most affluent artisans and merchants, along with the more prominent noblemen who had moved into towns from the countryside, constituted the leadership of each town. These leaders exercised as much power as they conceivably could in a network or networks of closely-linked families and friends, characterized by numerous frictions. Below the small layer of leaders, the number of inhabitants was much larger, consisting, in the royal free towns, of less affluent citizens and the masses of the disenfranchised poor. Tensions between them and the leaders were channeled into sending complaints to higher authorities and often resulted in fights, but the essential oligarchic structure of towns remained unaltered.

A steady influx of mostly impoverished noblemen into the towns in search of a better life characterized eighteenth century Hungary. Many of these nobles took up a trade or became merchants, while maintaining their noble status and insisting on keeping their tax exemption. More ambitious nobles who were better off quickly assumed leadership positions in their respective towns and constituted much of the roster of delegates from free royal towns to the 1790–91 diet. A sense of separateness, frequently tainted with arrogance, obedience to county rather than town authorities, and reluctance to share the tax burden, or, if this were not possible, attempts to minimize it—all of these attitudes on the part of many nobles created ill feelings and conflicts with the non-nobles.

Yet, in the patterns of ambivalence so familiar in human affairs, the better-off nobles also served as models to affluent non-noble members of the urban upper crust, who were inclined to imitate them. These non-noble townspeople, rather than investing their surplus money in the towns where they lived, often purchased vineyards or small estates, and quite a few of them applied to enter the noble estate itself.

To be a noble, in the original sense, one had to be prepared to fight and shed blood for one's country. Prejudice against peasants was still sufficiently strong to prevent a peasant soldier from becoming ennobled, while well-to-do townsmen could buy their way into the nobility with the right amount of cash. This particular mixture of the old and

34 Gonda, *A zsidóság Magyarországon*, 36–47, 314.

the new during a transitional age was already well-established in France and elsewhere in the west. The Crown was negative about a large-scale ennoblement, because it would have diminished the tax base for the imperial treasury. Nor were members of the old nobility overjoyed by the arrival of newcomers whom they perceived as upstarts diluting their ranks.

Although the upper crust did reach a level of comfort in its living conditions and came to enjoy the fruits of urban culture, the political weight that this middle class carried in a noble-dominated society was, at least in certain towns, negligible. Yet pride in urban accomplishments, however modest, was not missing, as the terms of a self-serving action by the noble delegates of Bács County, demonstrated. They tried to prevent the elevation of Szabadka in Southern Hungary into a free royal town at the 1790–91 diet. Szabadka should not be included in the ranks of free royal towns, they argued, because it had no large and ornate buildings, with some houses lacking even windows and chimneys, to the point that they should not even be called houses but, rather, huts. The people living there were not worthy of the honorable title “burgess,” given that very few among them were engaged in handicraft, and the word “commerce” was not even worth mentioning. According to the noble delegates, the bulk of the population consisted of *incivilis inqualitatus*, a bunch of uneducated and uncultured peasants.³⁵

Although the guilds continued to dominate industrial development, which was seriously hampered, above all, by the lack of markets, a budding entrepreneurial culture did evolve, primarily among certain aristocrats. Counts Sándor Károlyi and János Pálffy set up textile factories in the 1720s and 1730s, and Baron Miklós Vay and Count Károly Batthyány did the same decades later, in the 1790s. “Vay was a Protestant aristocrat of modest means,” wrote Orsolya Szakály, “and Batthyány a rich Catholic magnate. They were just two examples of the nobles who were directly involved in some type of business enterprise, be it agricultural or industrial. They worked closely with fellow noble bureaucrats and landowners, many of whom supported such enterprises by investing their money in manufactories and companies.”

35 Kosáry, 92–3; Géza Eperjessy, “A városi magisztrátusok és a nemesi vármegyék a reformkori Magyarországon” [The urban city administrations and the noble counties in Hungary during the Age of Reform], proceedings of a conference in *Tanárképzés és Tudomány* 1 (1986), 244.

These men believed that, following Great Britain's example, moderate economic reforms in Hungary would greatly benefit themselves and their country at the same time. After all, "they saw Britain as an oligarchy, where aristocrats and the gentry were... freely enjoying their traditional monopoly of political power and patronage."³⁶

As the eighteenth century was coming to a close, a distinct group of non-nobles, the so-called *honoratiores*, had taken up certain occupations, such as priests or pastors, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, journalists, doctors, and engineers. Although most of these occupations had already existed, the state and other lay institutions were gradually replacing, except for priests and pastors, the various churches as sources of employment in a society slowly becoming less dominated by religious institutions. Joseph II's Patent of 1785 opened up educational opportunities regardless of social origin, making it possible for ambitious young men among the urban and rural strata of non-nobles to obtain an education, including at the university in Pest itself.

By the end of the century, non-noble students were in the majority in some high schools, and the ratio between noble and non-noble students was about even at the university's faculty of liberal arts. Only at the faculty of law and at law academies did noble students remain the dominant group. Finding a position after graduation was extremely difficult. Job-seekers vastly outnumbered available vacancies, resulting in chronic unemployment among a large segment of high school and university graduates, noble and non-noble alike. Nevertheless, the emergence of non-nobles in various professions did gradually change the social composition of Hungary's intellectual elite, which ultimately had far-reaching consequences for the country's history in the nineteenth century.³⁷

36 Barta, 89–91; Orsolya Szakály, "Enlightened self-interest: The development of an entrepreneurial culture within the Hungarian elite" in Richard Butterwick, Simon Davies, and Gabriel Sanchez-Espinoza (eds.), *Peripheries of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2008), 10–1.

37 Kosáry, 104–5; Károly Vörös, "A modern értelmiség kezdetei Magyarországon" [The beginnings of the modern intelligentsia in Hungary], *Valóság* 18, no. 10 (1975), 1–3; Gusztáv Heckenast, "A honorációrok a reformkorban" [The honoratiores in the Age of Reform], *Századok* 123, nos. 3–4 (1989), 1–4; Éva Windisch V., "Az értelmiség létszámának kérdéséhez" [On the question of the numbers of the intelligentsia] in Ferenc Glatz (ed.), *Európa vonzásában. Emlékkönyv Kosáry Domokos 80. születésnapjára* [In awe of Europe: Festschrift on the occasion of Domokos Kosáry's 80th birthday] (Budapest, 1993), 122–5.

The unitary character of the nobility was rooted in ironclad principles, enshrined in Werbőczy's sixteenth century *Tripartitum*, which acknowledged no legal distinctions among nobles. Indeed, certain privileges, including immunity from arbitrary arrest, personal liberty, subordination only to the Crown, and the right to own land and enjoy its income without any obligation to pay taxes—all these were integral parts of being a noble, whether the noble in question was a prince or a pauper. The reality of course belied this mythical unity, because differences in the real world, rather than similarities in principle, determined how a nobleman lived and behaved. Nevertheless, for all these differences within the nobility, a certain sense of commonly shared corporate interests did prevail among them.

Back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of the magnates, surrounded by sizable numbers of the lesser nobility in their respective fortifications, were still actively involved in the defense of the country. In fact, sons of the latter received their mostly military education at such fortifications. Once the Turks were gone from Hungary and the Rákóczi Rebellion had been defeated in 1711, this situation drastically changed. The magnates, as their military function was becoming obsolete, built castles, frequently in the baroque style, turning them into centers of social life and estate management. No longer was it necessary to keep retinues of the lesser nobility and or to educate their sons in the martial arts.

The gulf between the magnates and the lesser nobility grew ever larger, reinforced by the magnates' desire to extend their lands as much as possible. This endeavor coincided with the self-interest of the Habsburg dynasty. Vienna wished to secure the magnates' loyalty by confiscating the estates of Rákóczi and of those who remained loyal to him and then distributing them among reliable families, both Hungarian and foreign. A proliferation of titles accompanied this process. The number of families with titles tripled in comparison to their numbers in the seventeenth century, reaching 155 by 1780, including the families of two princes, eighty-four counts, and sixty-nine barons. From then on, the proper name for people holding any of these titles was "aristocrats." In addition, the number of naturalized foreign, mostly Austrian German, families, called the *indigena*, who had received lands in Hungary, grew to 249, although many of them recoiled from

living in what to them was a strange land and sold their property to Hungarian landowners.³⁸

Queen Maria Theresa found an additional way to tie at least part of the native-born aristocratic families to the court, namely, by successfully attracting the more affluent aristocratic families from western Hungary to live in Vienna. In fact, 83% of the Hungarian dignitaries serving in Vienna came from their ranks.³⁹ The allurements of Vienna, with its spacious public parks, theatres, museums, splendid palaces, and mansions, provided a magnet especially to those who arrived from relatively affluent but simpler environments. Rich aristocrats, whatever their origins in various corners of the Monarchy, threw themselves headlong into endless amusements and soon came to regard Vienna as their real home.

The relatively poor aristocrats from Eastern Hungary could not afford to live in Vienna. In some instances, as in the famous case of Count Sándor Károlyi, the onetime general of Rákóczi turned loyal subject after 1711, attachment to Hungarian ways in language and dress strongly precluded any attraction to foreign ways.

This was usually not the case for aristocrats from Western Hungary. Living in Vienna with their families, they were by no means solely preoccupied with amusements. Quite a few of these heads of families had real influence, and others landed in more ceremonial positions or in the royal administration. Maria Theresa sent Prince Miklós Esterházy, one of the richest Hungarian aristocrats, to represent the Bohemian elector at the coronation of her son, Archduke Joseph, when he was crowned King of Rome of the Holy Roman Empire in Frankfurt am Main in 1764. At the price of nearly 300,000 gold florins, the prince put on such a splendid show in Frankfurt that it dazzled the young Goethe.⁴⁰

38 Károly Vörös, "A társadalmi fejlődés Magyarországon" [Society's evolution in Hungary] in Győző Ember and Gusztáv Heckenast (eds.), *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary] (Budapest, 1989), 680–3; Barta, 40; Sándor Dománovszky, *Magyar művelődéstörténet* [Hungarian cultural history], 5 volumes (Budapest, 1941), 4: 288–90; hereafter cited as *MM*.

39 Barta, 40, 44.

40 Rebecca Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates of the Esterhazy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II* (Baltimore, 1994), 44–5.

Living in Vienna meant securing imperial patronage, speaking German or French, taking advantage of the opportunity to travel even further west, and participating in a social scene which gave aristocratic young men and women the chance to marry into other aristocratic families, regardless of ethnic ties, although one British historian claims that such intermarriages were infrequent. Whatever their numbers, the fact remains that ethnic ties were bound to weaken in such a truly cosmopolitan milieu. Looking back at this situation over a hundred years later, the Hungarian nationalist Béla Grünwald used sharp words while condemning these aristocrats for betraying their nation by abandoning its national language and character, and indeed, the very interests of Hungary. Views about the aristocrats from Hungary in the imperial city became more modulated in time, but still a great deal of ink has been spilled on arguments about how to calibrate these aristocrats' acculturation into their cosmopolitan surroundings as opposed to their residual Hungarian sentiments.⁴¹

These arguments overlook the important fact that any sense of national awakening was still largely absent during the decades when Maria Theresa reigned. She was, in Hungarian eyes, not only a monarch, the wife of the Holy Roman Emperor, but, even more importantly, the queen of Hungary. Therefore, service to her could logically be equated with serving the country. In what form or in what language had not yet become a relevant point. Furthermore, even if this aristocracy were not nationally conscious, it was socially conscious of its special status and supremely aware of the necessity of its continuing to persevere in protecting its noble privileges.

All the differences separating the aristocracy and the lesser nobility did not prevent them, in numerous instances, including the 1764–65

41 P.G.M. Dickson, *Finance and government under Maria Theresa, 1740–1780* (Oxford, 1987), 1, 112; Béla Grünwald, *A régi Magyarország* [The old Hungary] (Budapest, 1910), 102; Éva H. Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765–1800* (Budapest, 1997), 104; Béla K. Király, *Hungary in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1969), 10; Henrik Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1910), 115–6; Julius Miskolczy, *Ungarn in der Habsburger Monarchie* (Wien, 1959), 17; László Deme, "From nation to class: The changing role of the Hungarian nobility," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 1, no. 4 (1988), 533–74.

diet, from forming a common front to secure their shared privileges.⁴² However, the Hungarian aristocracy was by no means monolithic, and its representatives in Vienna and at their country estates manifested a broad spectrum of behaviors, ranging from keeping many, or only a few, Hungarian national customs to ignoring them altogether.

The lesser nobility constituted the bulk of this privileged estate. During the course of the eighteenth century, their numbers were difficult to ascertain. The nobles had resisted Vienna's efforts to conduct an up-to-date census, because they were understandably concerned that the primary motive behind these efforts was the court's desire to begin taxing the nobility as well. As a result, census-taking was aborted in 1723 and again in 1732, and only unreliable numbers could be obtained in 1754. The court did not target the influential and more prosperous nobles who could have paid the most in taxes, but, rather, the poorest and the most vulnerable segment of the nobility, the so-called *armalists*, nobles who, at the time of their ennoblement, had received from the king a document, but no land attached to it. To Vienna's surprise, noble solidarity in defense of shared privileges repeatedly asserted itself in successive debates at the diets, where the principle of immunity from taxation for all nobles was defended. In practice, however, distinguishing both the *armalists* and the so-called *curialists*, who did own a single plot, from the peasantry proved to be impossible, and most *armalists* ended up paying taxes at least some of the time.

The first relatively reliable census took place between 1784 and 1787. Members of the nobility were not accurately counted, because noble women were counted as women, not as nobles. Of the total population of 8.5 million, nobles accounted for 197,000, or 4.6% of the population, less than in Poland (8–12%), but more than in France (1–1.5%). At the top were the aristocrats, followed by 700–800 families, the *bene possessionati*, who were moderately well-to-do. As leaders in their counties, they represented the backbone of their estate, with a self-confidence deriving from their relative economic wealth, social position, and familiarity with both local and national politics. Their horizons, with few exceptions, were narrow and their education limited, although still superior to the culture of the vast majority of the poor nobles.

42 C.A. Macartney, "Hungary" in A. Goodwin (ed.), *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1953), 131–2; Győző Ember, "A barokk rendi társadalom" [Baroque feudal society] in *MM* 4: 145–6.

Below the *bene possessionati* were the *possessionati*, an intermediate layer between the former and the poor nobles, who in time came to be known as “nobles of the seven plum trees,” or, if they were truly dirt poor, then “sandal-wearing nobles.” They, accounting for 90% of the Hungarian nobility and working with their hands, were in fact peasants, but they were even more adamant than the well-to-do nobles in drawing a line between themselves and the serfs. The poor nobles became increasingly more vocal in defending their essentially sham privileges than those who truly benefited from noble status. These poor nobles, because of their economic and psychological vulnerabilities, could be and were easily manipulated in ruthless political battles which later came to characterize the 1830s and, even more so, the 1840s.⁴³

The classic and most frequently used example of life among the *bene possessionati* during the eighteenth century comes from the pen of Ferenc Kazinczy, the prominent man of letters. He described in detail the life of his maternal grandfather, Ferenc Bossányi, a leading light in Bihar County, who was chosen as a delegate to the 1751 and 1764 diets. Although prosperous by the standards of his time, Bossányi and his family lived in a reed-thatched adobe. He dominated his surroundings from this modest “family seat” with patriarchal authority. He functioned as judge, advisor, arbitrator to blunderers, litigants, and supplicants, some who came to him from other counties. He cared little about his wealth, and what he possessed was the source of enjoyment to him, rather than the basis for further material gain. He could amply provide for his family, but his dress was simple and his estate essentially self-sufficient. In this way, desire and necessity fused, because the marketing opportunities were slim, especially for landowners in eastern Hungary. This, in turn, limited their scope of interests, but Ferenc Bossányi was blissfully unaware of this. His wife Júlia was a model mother and housewife, according to Kazinczy, no servant to her husband, but not quite his equal partner, either. She never entered a house ahead of him, but always behind. Although she could read, her whole life centered around her courtyard, kitchen, and pantry.⁴⁴

43 Barta, 49–51; István Szabó, *Jobbágyok–parasztok* [Serfs–peasants] (Budapest, 1976), 240–2; Deme, “From nation to class,” 575–8.

44 Ferenc Kazinczy, *Pályám emlékezete* [The memories of my career] (Budapest, n.d.), 23, 24, 26, 27; Barta, 53.

These well-to-do and influential noblemen represented a considerable source of loyal support to Queen Maria Theresa, but they also exasperated her on many occasions by their stubborn sense of corporate egotism, primarily manifested by their recalcitrance to share equitably in the Monarchy's tax burden. It was, therefore, logical on the queen's part to initiate efforts to win over at least some *bene possessionati* by adapting her earlier, successful campaign of seducing Western Hungarian aristocrats to live in and become acculturated to Vienna. However, the chances for this second campaign's success were not as high, considering the much larger number of the *bene possessionati* and their stronger provincial attachments.

The starting date of this effort was the establishment of the queen's noble life guards in 1760. How much importance the queen attached to this project was indicated by the fact that, in spite of her visceral distaste for Protestants, the tenth point in her edict of September 11, 1760 allowed for the admission of Protestants into the life guards. Failure to allow this would have defeated her purpose, because a considerable segment of the Eastern Hungarian nobility was Protestant. Another sign of Maria Theresa's commitment to this project was the money she planned to lavish on the life guards, a hundred thousand florins.⁴⁵

The life guards, an elite group of cavalymen, were drawn from the army and the counties. The queen's edict set their number at 120. They primarily performed guard duties, and, on at least one occasion, guardsmen rescued the queen from serious injuries. Usually tall, handsome, and dressed in resplendent uniforms, they were the toast of elegant Viennese society. "There was no court festival, no amusement, no entertainment where Hungarian guardsmen were not welcome," reminisced one guardsman, the writer Sándor Báróczi. "Members of the imperial family themselves showed the friendliest attitude towards them." The general sense in Vienna that Hungarian were barbarians was visually molded by the presence of the life guards, who were viewed as attractively exotic when they were functioning as the queen's

45 János Illésházy, "A magyar királyi testőrség felállítása 1760-ban" [The establishment of the Hungarian Royal Guard in 1760], *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 8 (1895), 545; László Deme, "Maria Theresa's noble lifeguards and the rise of the Hungarian enlightenment and nationalism" in Béla K. Király and Walter Scott Dillard (eds.), *The East-Central European Officer Corps 1740–1920's: Social Origins, Selection, Education and Training* (Boulder–Highland Lakes, 1988), 197.

life guards in their ornate uniforms and dramatic headgear. Some of the guardsmen were performing valuable courier duties to foreign countries by the late 1770s and 1780s. These duties could entail more than carrying an item from one place to another. Chancellor Kaunitz, for example, ordered these couriers to report anything political significant while abroad.⁴⁶

Báróczi, the rare eyewitness who knew the guardsmen as they were from the inside, revealed occasional dark sides to flamboyant depictions of the Hungarian life guards, reporting dissensions and mutual recriminations in the ranks, one case of serious embezzlement, and even a gruesome murder case. On the whole, though, they honorably acquitted themselves. During the outbreak of hostilities against France, commencing in 1792, many guardsmen rejoined the regular army to fight. A few of them, including Báróczi, Ábrahám Barcsay, and, most importantly, György Bessenyei, did become representative figures in the evolution of Hungarian literature. Their exposure to higher culture in Vienna and other foreign cities encouraged the awakening of intellectual curiosity and provided an impetus for further learning among at least some of these young men.⁴⁷

As far as women were concerned, both their legal status and the reality of their lives destined them to live in a patriarchal society under their fathers' and, later, their husbands' control. Nevertheless, within this general rule, individual nuances among couples and families did exist. So did attempts to elevate womanhood, at least in principle, to higher levels. While honoring women's roles by no means amounted to emancipation, it did acknowledge the value of Hungarian women as mothers and wives, and, in some cases, as genuine partners in marriage. In one author's opinion, the status of women among the nobility and especially among its elite, the *bene possessionati*, was neither dispossessed nor oppressed; women were integral parts of noble society.⁴⁸

46 Illésházy, *A magyar testőrség felállítása*, 545; Ferenc Krúdy (ed.), *Báróczi Sándor feljegyzései a magyar nemesi testőrség életéből, 1760–1800* [Sándor Báróczi's notes on the life of the Hungarian Royal Guard 1760–1800] (Budapest, 1936), 25, 57, 48, 60, 73, 86; Éva H. Balázs, "Egy forrás margójára" [On the margin of a source] in Glatz (ed.), *Európa vonzásában*, 110.

47 Krúdy, *Báróczi Sándor feljegyzései*, 86.

48 István M. Szijártó, "Armpruszter Anna 'földesasszony'" [Anna Armpruszter, "landowner"] in Magdolna Laczay (ed.), *Nők és férfiak. ...avagy a nemek története* [Women and men: ...Or the history of genders] (Nyíregyháza, 2003), 176.

This, however, was the case only within very real limits, because in patriarchal families, which was the norm, men possessed undisputed power, certainly in principle and usually in real life as well. The most flattering contemporary accounts of wives described them as pious, gentle, and, most importantly, obedient. Marriages were generally arranged, and the physical abuse of wives was quite common. In these situations, oppression was a brutal reality. Noble women in the countryside could be relatively more independent, and, in the absence of their husbands, were often in charge of their family estates. Some late eighteenth century wills of noble families recognized property as joint between husband and wife. Women could also own and inherit property, although a daughter in a landowner's family was usually, compared to her brother or brothers, at a relative disadvantage in this regard. Women in serf families, customarily subjugated both by their landowners and their husbands, could be and frequently were easy targets of brutality.⁴⁹

Women among the privileged were taught how to behave in their various roles by so-called female guidebooks. Written abroad in the west and translated into Hungarian, these books presented a ubiquitous cultural conformity that included identical expectations of female behavior in all the civilized or civilizing countries of Europe. At the center of these expectations stood the woman as a mother, entrusted with the primary responsibility for bringing up her children well and assuring their virtue, as well as their mental and physical health. Mothers were expected to do this by impressing their own religious faith upon their children. All guidebooks asserted that faith was the foundation of a virtuous life, and, therefore, of proper child-rearing as well. For a woman to be virtuous, she had to be not only religious, but also sentimental, soft, modest, good-hearted, and prim, so that she could contrast with and optimally complement men's presumed rationality, strength, and occasional roughness.

Some guidebooks wished to restrict the education of women to practical subjects connected with housekeeping and also with games and music. Others advocated teaching history, literature, and philosophy to women, but not so much for the sake of widening their intellectual

49 Ibid., 171–3; Henry Kamen, *Early Modern Society* (London, 2000), 157; Ida Bobula, *A nő a XVIII. század magyar társadalmában* [The woman in the society of 18th century Hungary] (Budapest, 1933), 33, 36, 38, 49, 165.

horizons. Rather, the intention of the advice in these books was to avoid an educated husband's becoming bored with an ignorant wife. In the end, however, it was not so much bookish knowledge as amiability, gentle manners, and modesty that were presumed to lead to a man's heart and to a much-sought-after marriage proposal. Once married, the wife was expected to be loyal, obedient, and kind to her husband, taking good care of him and their children as the paragon of domestic virtues, as a good housewife.⁵⁰

These guidebooks prescribed what was viewed as the ideal. Reality provided a much wider range of behaviors. In certain cases, wives would not openly challenge their husbands' dominance, but they could gain real supremacy through sheer cunning. In other instances, some wives did get caught up in a wild pursuit of new fashions and bankrupted their families. In yet other situations, noble women acquired reputations of irresponsibility and easy virtue. Robert Townson ran into such women when he visited Pozsony.⁵¹

The position of women depended mostly on the quality of their marriages, and not all husbands were unfeeling brutes. Count Miklós Bethlen, for instance, had a great deal of affection for his first wife, whom he called "my lovely good Ilona." He claimed to have embarked on the writing of his memoirs for her and upon her request. In contrast, Baron Péter Apor contracted a most unhappy marriage; his wife left him after twenty-seven years. She eventually returned, but they continued to live together as complete strangers. Apor was understandably defensive about his own behavior towards her, claiming that he peacefully suffered by her side, never scolded her, and hit her "only" twice, one time rather gently and another time hard, but only once.⁵²

50 Zsófia László, "'Asszony-népnek megkívántató tudomány.' Női életvezetési könyvek a XVIII. századi Magyarországon" ["Knowledge for ladies": Female guidebooks in 18th century Hungary], Conference on "Nők világa. Nőkép és női szerepek a 17–19. századi Magyarországon" [The world of women: Female image and female roles in Hungary from the 17th through the 19th centuries]. Lecture in the Petőfi Literary Museum, Budapest, February 12, 2004.

51 Bobula, *A nő a XVIII. század magyar társadalmában*, 182, 133, 132–3; Townson, *Travels in Hungary*, 441–4.

52 Gábor Tolnai (ed.), *Gróf Bethlen Miklós önéletírása* [The autobiography of Count Miklós Bethlen] (Budapest, n.d.), 94, 354, 7; see also a more recent edition: Bernard Adams, *The Autobiography of Miklos Bethlen* (London–New York, 2004); Lajos Szadeczky (ed.), *Báró Apor Péter verses művei és levelei (1676–1752)* [The poems and letters of Baron Péter Apor (1676–1752)] (Budapest, 1903), 364–5.

Hungary's multi-ethnic character functioned in new and reinforced constellations during the eighteenth century. Continuity prevailed in certain instances. For example, the Croats' autonomous status had been recognized by Hungary ever since the twelfth century, when Hungarian conquest had been followed up by making Croatia a co-dominion, an annexed province with its own local autonomy, rather than directly incorporating it into Hungary. In time, Croatia came to have its own assembly, in which Hungarians could not participate, called the Sabor, and the head of an autonomous administration, the Ban. The joint struggle against the Turks had cemented Croatian–Hungarian brotherhood in arms. Croats and Hungarians alike celebrated certain heroes, first and foremost Count Miklós Zrínyi (1620–64), Ban of Croatia, poet, and military leader.

Nevertheless, frictions between Hungarians and Croats were becoming frequent. Hungarians did not like the paradoxical facts that Croatian delegates of the Sabor to Hungarian diets could interfere in the affairs of the latter, but that Hungarian deputies had no right to interfere in the Sabor. Croats, for their part, resented the fact that laws passed at the Hungarian diets were valid in Croatia as well. Another issue of contention stemmed from the fact that Croatian nobles were staunch Catholics—no Protestant could occupy any official position in Croatia—and, thus, their support for Article 22 at the 1604 diet, confirmed again in the 1720s, spelling out the prohibition against discussing religious matters at diets, infuriated Hungarian Protestant nobles. Croats tended to assert both their community of interests with the Hungarians and their separate identity. For example, their own Pragmatica Sanctio of 1712 stated that, while Croatia was part of Hungary, it was simultaneously independent from it, because “we are freemen and not slaves.”⁵³

The Serbs displayed a somewhat similar corporate consciousness and desire for separation, but their case was much less strongly supported by legally binding clauses or historical tradition. After all, the majority of the Serbs had moved to Hungary only in 1690 as refugees from the Ottoman-occupied Balkans. Between 20,000 and 30,000 of

53 Barta, 159–60; Endre Arató, *A feudális nemzetiségtől a polgári nemzetig* [From the feudal nationality to the bourgeois nation] (Budapest, 1975), 9–11; Dénes Sökcsevits, *Magyar múlt horvát szemmel* [The Hungarian past through Croatian eyes] (Budapest, 2004), 14, 19, 20.

them had arrived under the leadership of the Patriarch of Ipek, Arsenije Čarnojević. Vienna perceived Serbs as allies in its continuing war against the Ottoman Empire, and the privileges that they received in 1691 reflected this policy. They were promised that, in the event of a victory over the Turks, they would be repatriated and allowed to live according to their own laws and customs and under their own chosen leaders. This victory never truly materialized, but the Serbs came to interpret their privileged status as the basis from which to claim a part of Hungary as their own autonomous territory.

Although the military frontiers along Hungary's southern borders, under Vienna's military command, qualified as semi-autonomous territories, Serbian peasants who lived there paid no taxes to landowners and were not in bondage to anyone. They served as free border guards and acquired a reputation as an effective military force. Following the termination of the Seven Years' War against Prussia in 1763, Maria Theresa "extended the military border system along the entire southern frontier of Hungary." This relatively inexpensive system was established for a combination of economic and military reasons.⁵⁴

Many Serbs eventually abandoned their military careers, moved north, usually entered the corn trade, and lived in Serbian communities, mostly in Buda, Pest, Szentendre, Paks, and Komárom. Some Serbian merchants became quite prosperous. Their corporate sense of themselves under ecclesiastical leadership continued even under these new circumstances. They periodically held so-called national congresses starting in 1744, where not only church-related matters, but also political issues were discussed. These congresses kept alive the idea of territorial autonomy, which both Vienna and the Hungarian counties found totally unacceptable and categorically rejected.⁵⁵

54 Gunther Erich Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740–1881: A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago, 1966), 41.

55 Barta, 161–2; Arató, *A feudális nemzetiségtől a polgári nemzetig*, 24–9; Mihály Ferdinándy and Lajos Gogolák, *Magyarok és délszlávok* [Hungarians and Southern Slavs] (Budapest, 1940), 22–6; Ferenc Szakály, "Szerbek Magyarországon – szerbek a magyar történelemben" [Serbs in Hungary – Serbs in Hungarian history] in István Zombori (ed.), *A szerbek Magyarországon* [Serbs in Hungary] (Szeged, 1991), 30–4; István Pelyach, "Szerbek Magyarországon 1848 előtt" [Serbs in Hungary before 1848] in Gábor Erdődy and Attila Pók (eds.), *Nemzeteken innen és túl. Tanulmányok Diószegi István 70. születésnapjára* [Beyond nations: Studies on the occasion of István Diószegi's 70th birthday] (Budapest, 2000), 41.

At the same time, the mixture of prosperity and proximity to Germans and Hungarians in towns such as Buda, Pest, and elsewhere did somewhat dilute the Serbs' sense of nearly total distinctiveness. Many of them came to identify with Hungarians not in an ethnic sense, but as inhabitants of Hungary, a country they adopted as their own, a country with which they increasingly identified. This so-called *hungarus* consciousness led both to bilingualism and an easy interchange of roles, well illustrated by Mihailo Vitković or Mihály Vitkovics (1778–1829). A lawyer and poet, who was extremely popular in the literary circles of Pest, he composed poems in Hungarian and in Serbian with equal ease and had no qualms whatsoever about being a man of multiple loyalties. “The Kingdom of Hungary is Europe in miniature,” wrote Johann (János) Csaplovics as he defined this *hungarus* consciousness in 1821. “Under the word ‘Hungarian’ one means all the peoples who live in Hungary. Slovaks and Germans are all Hungarians, because they reside in Hungary.”⁵⁶

Germans in Transylvania, known as the Saxons, did obtain rights as one of Transylvania's privileged nations, but this was not the case with German immigrants in Hungary proper, with one exception. That is, Saxon townspeople in Northern Hungary were protected by urban privileges if they lived in free royal towns. However, most of the German arrivals were peasants who received advantageous terms that they could exploit well, especially because they brought with them the knowledge of more advanced agricultural methods and an inclination to work hard. Most, though not all, of them were Catholics from Southern Germany who came to be known in Hungary as the Swabians. They settled primarily in Transdanubia, Southern Hungary, and in villages around Buda.

Although the Swabians preferred to settle in compact communities, the fact that they often came from different places in a politically fragmented Germany, characterized by strong local traditions, meant that these settlements in Hungary, lacking common traditions, possessed no common German consciousness. The situation was not really different in the towns, where German artisans, merchants, ministers, writers, and scholars spoke and wrote German and participated in all the available aspects of German culture, and also became imbued, for

56 Quoted in Moritz Csáky, “Die Hungarus-Konzeption” in Anna M. Drabek (ed.), *Ungarn und Österreich unter Maria Theresa und Joseph II* (Wien, 1982), 80.

the most part, with *hungarus* consciousness. A good example would be Karl Gottlieb von Windisch, a native of Pozsony. He learned both Hungarian and Slovak in his youth, while remaining deeply rooted in his native German language and culture. After entering the city administration, he became mayor of Pozsony for a few years. His real claim to fame derived from his writings, both in newspaper articles and books. In 1780, he published a book, entitled *Geography and History of Hungary*, which was used as a textbook in schools. According to an expert on German–Hungarian relations, Windisch was one of the most distinguished representatives of the “*hungarus*” consciousness, who wished to elevate Hungary’s reputation in all his writings. Following his example, Lajos Schedius, his son-in-law, became even more intimately involved in the intellectual life of Hungary.⁵⁷

The migration of Slovaks was a voluntary transfer from one part of the Hungarian Kingdom to another, because poor Slovak serfs received better terms in some parts of the Great Plain with an acute labor shortage than in their original crowded mountainous regions of Northern Hungary. Other Slovaks moved into mostly Northern Hungarian towns. The Slovaks were divided by religion. Approximately 71% of them were Catholics, and 29% were Lutherans. This split caused some tension within the still very small group of Slovak intellectuals. Slovak Protestants were more inclined to view themselves as integral parts of a Czecho-Slovak entity within the Monarchy. Juraj Ribay, for example, claimed that the Czech and Slovak languages were virtually identical and that the Slovaks should rely on the Czechs, because otherwise they would completely lose out. In contrast, although the Catholic Anton Bernolák proclaimed that the Slovak language and culture were unique, he did not think that any political implications issued from this claim. In fact, the vast majority of Slovaks had no sense of nationhood yet. The nobles among them, even if they spoke Slovak at home, considered themselves fully integrated with their Hungarian counterparts.⁵⁸

57 Barta, 160–1; Kosáry, 57–8; Béla Pukánszky, *Német polgárság magyar földön* [The German bourgeoisie in Hungary] (Budapest, 1940); Fritz Valjavec, *Karl Gottlieb von Windisch: Das Lebensbild eines Südost-deutschen Bürgers der Aufklärungszeit* (München, 1936); Béla Pukánszky, Review of Fritz Valjavec’s *Karl Gottlieb von Windisch*, *Századok* 71, nos. 7–8 (1937), 35–6.

58 Barta, 163; Kosáry, 57; Arató, *A feudális nemzetiségtől a polgári nemzetig*, 109–21; Ludwig von Gogolak, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Slowakischen Volkes* (München, 1963), 196–242.

Massive Romanian immigration into Transylvania made the Romanians the largest ethnic group in Transylvania. However, large-scale poverty among them, their migratory way of life, and the absence of a nationally conscious noble leadership resulted in the absolute refusal of Transylvania's privileged groups—the Hungarians, the Saxons, and the Székelys⁵⁹—to accept Romanians as their equals. The most backward national minority were the Rusyns, the vast majority of whom were very poor serfs. Their lives were closely intertwined with their respective Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, which were engaging in a fierce rivalry with one another.⁶⁰

The national census ordered by Joseph II in 1784 was not interested in comparative numbers of various ethnic peoples in Hungary, but nevertheless did collect the following information: ethnic Hungarians, numbering approximately 3.5 million of an estimated total population of 9.3 million, accounted for well less than half of the population, while remaining the relatively largest group. The census reported around 1.5 million Romanians, 1.25 million Slovaks, 1.1 million Germans, 800,000 Croats, 600,000 Serbs, 300,000 Rusyns, and a total of 300,000 Armenians, Greeks, and others.⁶¹

THE INSTITUTIONS

In the rather clumsy division of labor between the central government and the county administrations, the latter embodied both the extent and limits of *bene possessionati* power, because this group basically controlled these administrations. Historians have differed about the purposes for which the *bene possessionati* were striving and what they were actually capable of accomplishing. The views of late nineteenth century analysts of the counties, not surprisingly, reflected their own biases. Béla Grünwald, a champion of centralization during the second half of the century, looked back at eighteenth century counties and saw absolutely no redeeming features in them. The counties, according to Grünwald, functioned only as bastions of traditionalism in defense of

59 A distinct Hungarian group, probably of Turkic origin.

60 Barta, 162–3; Kosáry, 59; Alexander Bonkalo, *The Rusyns* (New York, 1990), 26–8; Paul Magocsi, *A Historiographical Guide to Subcarpathian Rus'* (Cambridge, 1974), 221–5.

61 Kosáry, 59.

narrow parochial interests and, therefore, as impediments to progress. The judgment of Ákos Beöthy, also during the second half of the nineteenth century, came closer to mainstream thinking about the counties. Beöthy regarded them as genuine organs of self-government, the equivalents of the American states or Swiss cantons. While even Beöthy recognized their limitations, he nevertheless claimed that the counties of Hungary had succeeded in creating a *Pax Hungarica* in the eighteenth century.⁶²

The approaches of these authors represent the two diametrically contrasting ways that the counties in Hungary have been viewed. Grünwald, describing them as they really were, albeit with some negative exaggerations, correctly stated that county administrations consistently and jealously guarded noble privileges and the narrow parochial interests of the *bene possessionati*. On the other hand, while Beöthy was mistaken in viewing the counties as full-blown manifestations of enlightened self-government, it is also true that some county officials did take seriously their obligations to the welfare of their counties, thereby going beyond the protection of their own entrenched privileges.

Instances in which county administrations actively or passively sabotaged royal reform initiatives support Grünwald's thesis. The sabotage in opposition to Joseph II's unpopular reforms was quite conscious. In other situations, the sabotage might not have been intentional but, rather, at least partially stemmed from an inefficiency built into the county structure. The chief official of the county was the lord lieutenant, who was usually an aristocrat appointed by the king. This position could also be hereditary in certain aristocratic families or among bishops of certain dioceses. For example, the palatine was always the lord lieutenant of Pest County.

The office was largely honorary, and the day-to-day handling of county affairs was the responsibility of the deputy lord lieutenant, an elective office. He and his top officials, among them the chief magistrates who headed the smaller administrative units within the counties, were not professional bureaucrats. First and foremost, they were landowners for whom county administration was a part-time task in which most of them were not fully invested. While they were serving,

62 Grünwald, *A régi Magyarország*, 398–443; Ákos Beöthy, *A magyar államiség fejlődése, küzdelmei* [The evolution and struggles of the Hungarian state], 3 volumes (Budapest, n.d.), 1: 783–90.

they definitely represented the concerns and interests of their county's most important and powerful families.⁶³

The high number of the so-called *táblabírók*, judges of the county courts, who were recruited from the ranks of the *possessionati* or even lower levels, reinforced this amateur approach to governance. Although a number of these *táblabírók* were indeed judges or worked in some other capacity, many among them did no work at all. Securing the title was the only thing that mattered to them, because it bestowed a modicum of prestige, however slight. By the end of the eighteenth century, each county had between 100 and 500 such nobles, totaling between eight and ten thousand in the whole country.⁶⁴

The other side of the coin was a form of democratic principle that was part myth and part reality. Although the county administrations were still largely oligarchic in practice, all nobles were equal in theory and had the right to be present at their respective counties' general assemblies. This "particular, archaic, and aristocratic noble democracy" contained the possibility of at least a partial realization of democracy in time, because it was founded on that unchallenged principle of the theoretical equality of all nobles. Indeed, the influence of the lower nobility did grow between 1750 and 1848.

Only a handful of Hungarians during the late eighteenth century could even imagine a genuine democratic future for Hungary. However, once the barriers within the counties began to erode gradually, a development still barely perceptible in that century, this slow process could in time lead to the legal inclusion, though not necessarily to the social acceptance, of non-nobles. Furthermore, as István Szijártó has pointed-out, the fact that at least a segment of the population was able to participate in politics was not altogether a negligible consideration in the era of the *ancien régime*.⁶⁵

63 Fallenbüchl, *Mária Terézia magyar hivatalnokai*, 43; Albert Gárdonyi, "A vármegye és a város társadalma" [The society of the county and the town] in *MM* 4: 315.

64 Király, *Hungary in the Late Eighteenth Century*, 112. In the opinion of András Gergely, that number is too high.

65 András Gergely, "Das Ungarische Komitat im 19. Jahrhundert" in Ferenc Glatz (ed.), *Études Historiques Hongroises 1990: Settlement and Society in Hungary*, 2 volumes (Budapest, 1990), 1: 208; István M. Szijártó, *A diéta. Magyar rendek és az országgyűlés, 1708–1792* (Budapest, 2005) [The diet: The Hungarian estates and the national assembly 1708–1792], 405; hereafter cited as *Diéta*.

Counties were not isolated. They were in constant communication with one another via letters, usually about jointly shared grievances against Vienna. In times of crisis, such as under Joseph II, inter-county communications reached a fever pitch. This correspondence had the potential of developing into communication about topics which could in time transcend the pursuit of provincial narrow self-interests.

A principal obligation of each county's general assembly was to elect two delegates to the diets. Usually, the deputy lord lieutenant himself was one of the delegates. They carried instructions that reflected the consensus in their respective assemblies on the issues of the day. The diets, consisting of an Upper and a Lower Chamber, were, with some exceptions, called together by the monarch, who also had the privilege and obligation to initiate legislation. Members of the Upper Chamber were aristocrats and Catholic bishops, while the noble delegates sent by their counties dominated the Lower Chamber. Representatives of the royal free towns and substitutes sent there by absentee aristocrats were also present at the diets, as were delegates sent by Catholic chapters of canons. The palatine and the personalis presided, respectively, over the Upper and the Lower Chamber. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, members of the latter began chafing under the supervision of the presiding personalis who, after all, was, or was at least regarded as, a government spokesman. In order to elude this supervision, delegates would meet informally in so-called district meetings. In fact, the noble delegates carried out their serious legislative business in such meetings, rather than in the official sessions.⁶⁶ Noble predominance was assured by granting only one collective vote to the royal free towns. The two delegates representing one county had one vote as well. The total number of counties in the Kingdom of Hungary, including the three counties in Croatia–Slavonia,⁶⁷ was fifty-three. In the rare case that the two delegates from the same county voted differently, their votes cancelled each other out.

Procedures of the diets were extremely cumbersome. The monarch's proposals were presented orally and in writing to both Chambers. Delegates in the Lower Chamber countered them with their own proposals, frequently a set of grievances aimed at the government and more

⁶⁶ *Diéta*, 339–48.

⁶⁷ Slavonia, also in the South, used to be royal property in its entirety in the Middle Ages. Eventually, it became increasingly associated with Croatia, thus the term *Croatia–Slavonia*.

often than not ignored by the monarch. The state nevertheless needed the diets' approval for how much tax could be levied and how many young men could be recruited to the army. Subsequently, a cat-and-mouse game would ensue between the two sides, complicated by the fact that both the monarch's signature and an agreement between the two Chambers was necessary for any law to be passed. For this to come about, endless wranglings, mediations, cajolings, intimidations, threats, and counter-threats took up a great deal of time and energy. At best, a compromise solution was enacted in the end, but the issue at hand quite frequently had to be shelved because no agreement between the parties could be reached. Although the monarchs were obligated to call together a diet once every three years, they, not surprisingly, often preferred to allow many years or even decades to pass before reluctantly convoking one. There were only eight diets between 1711 and 1795.⁶⁸

The noble delegates' presentation of grievances to the monarch, such as the demand that the monarch should reside in Hungary, re-appeared every single diet and, thus, had a certain ritualistic quality. Most other demands were designed to protect and, if possible, promote the interests of the nobility as a whole, with emphasis on *bene possessionati* concerns. Grünwald listed sixty-seven grievances for the diet held in 1751. In addition to the request for Queen Maria Theresa to move to Hungary, other demands included the employment of more Hungarian nobles in royal offices, more officers' commissions in the army, the counties' registration of complaints by serfs before the queen could consider them, and the guaranteed preservation of privileges even for those nobles who moved into towns.⁶⁹

In an age of growing state centralization, it was inevitable that the power and influence of the Habsburg state would increasingly encroach upon Hungary's noble-led county administrations without at the same time emasculating them, which did happen to their counterparts in the so-called hereditary crownlands. Among all the government organs relevant to Hungary, the Hungarian Court Chancery, located in Vienna, stood at the top. It interposed between government offices in Hungary and the monarch and also prepared royal decrees. If anything

68 Ibid., 320–30; George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism 1791–1841* (Princeton, 1968), 135–6; Barta, 107, 184; Király, *Hungary in the Late Eighteenth Century*, 82–7; László Révész, *Die Anfänge des Ungarischen Parlamentarismus* (München, 1968), 34–5.

69 Grünwald, *A régi Magyarország*, 366–7.

important were on the agenda, the case was referred to the Council of State, established by Maria Theresa in 1760. The most significant government office inside the country was the Vice-Regal Council in Pozsony, and, after 1784, in Buda. It was entrusted with the execution of royal decrees and their dispatch to the county administrations. By mid-century, its ten standing committees dealt with church affairs, along with concerns pertaining to education, commerce, censorship, transport, public health, and public safety, among others. The Hungarian Royal Treasury, also in Pozsony and then in Buda, was in charge of economic matters, collecting certain dues on tariffs and monopolies.⁷⁰

One sign of continued mistrust on Vienna's part was impeding the country's total administrative unity. Transylvania, the Temesvidék, and the military frontier—as long as it existed—continued to be separately administered. Only the partial separation of Croatia was historically grounded. In principle, all of these territories were considered integral parts of the Kingdom of Hungary. After all, it was emphasized, not so much at that time but later on, that the Pragmatic Sanction of 1723 had indivisibly and inseparably bound together not only the various parts of the realm, but the various parts of the Kingdom of Hungary as well.⁷¹

It was perhaps in the area of administering justice that matters of the state were most intertwined with the affairs of the nobility in the counties and the patricians in the towns. In the reorganization of 1723, the Royal Court was divided into the lower Royal Court of Appeal and what amounted to a supreme court, the Court of Seven. The latter adjudicated appeals, and its verdicts could not even be appealed to the king. Judges were appointed by both the monarch and the estates, but, even in the first case, they were definitely not composed of royal personnel. Below this structure were the district courts that eliminated the older practice of itinerant judges. The town courts and county courts had jurisdiction, respectively, over legal squabbles in towns and among nobles in the counties. Serfs were tried in manorial courts, where the landowners simultaneously functioned as plaintiffs

70 Barta, 107.

71 Ibid., 109–10; Imre Gonda and Emil Niederhauser, *A Habsburgok* [The Habsburgs] (Budapest, 1977), 111; R.J.W. Evans, "Maria Theresa and Hungary" in R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Essays on Central Europe, c. 1683–1867* (Oxford, 2006), 27.

and judges. Apart from the town courts, the preponderance of the nobility, particularly the aristocracy and Catholic prelates at the two high courts, was assured among the judges. Furthermore, it was Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* that furnished the legal foundation for the entire judicial system.⁷²

In spite of the success of Maria Theresa in completing at least the preparatory work of codifying both criminal and civil law in Austria, the abolition of torture and the branding on foreheads was all that she was able to accomplish in Hungary. Nevertheless, a chain of courts was in place, a development that in turn shifted the direction of meting out justice from a totally arbitrary and chaotic system to a slightly more transparent one, although central supervision of lower courts remained "sporadic, loose, and limited."⁷³

More direct was state intervention in the area of public health, although the still low level of medical knowledge and deplorable hygienic conditions could not prevent the spread of diseases, especially typhus and smallpox, that resulted in high mortality rates during epidemics. The state, starting around mid-century, took an active interest in the health of its subjects. The Vice-Regal Council had an office in charge of public health under a chief medical officer. In addition, one state physician was delegated to every county as well, whose duties included treating poor patients without charge and organizing preventive and protective measures against the various diseases. Their official reports covered all aspects of public health in their respective counties. Starting in the 1770s, the government tried to place a midwife in every district. Hospitals were set up in the larger towns and also in the counties, many of them managed by convents. Yet, most peasants in the countryside, and often nobles as well, relied on various healers and on the natural products of folk medicine. There were relatively few university-trained doctors, several of whom became prominent and were even elevated into the nobility. At the same time, barbers continued to function also as dentists and surgeons with predictable

72 This was a legal document, composed by the jurist István Werbőczy in 1514, summarizing the customary laws of the nobility. Although King Louis at the time did not sanction it, Werbőczy published it in 1517, and, as a practical matter, it became the authoritative legal document for the next three centuries.

73 Barta, 190–1; Endre Varga, *A királyi Kúria, 1780–1850* [The royal High Court, 1780–1850] (Budapest, 1974), 18–9.

and often very painful results. One of their most frequent procedures, blood-letting, was used for practically all possible ailments.⁷⁴

Hungary's various churches were the institutions most intimately involved with people on all levels. Following the defeat of the Turks and then the Rákóczi Rebellion, the churches had the challenge and the opportunity to rebuild. This was particularly true in the case of the Catholic Church, which was by far the largest denomination, with close to half of the population belonging to it by the end of the century. It certainly helped the Church that the majority of German settlers were also Catholics. The government also actively favored the Church and granted it large tracts of land. Veszprém County had 487 parishes during the Middle Ages. Only five of them had survived the cataclysmic events of previous centuries. Even before Bishop Márton Bíró Padányi brought his energetic leadership to the Church, 64 new parishes had been established. Padányi then added 39 additional parishes during his tenure as Bishop of Veszprém (1745–62) and built or renovated over one hundred churches.⁷⁵

Padányi is an interesting case for another reason as well, because he came from the lesser nobility. Most prelates were aristocrats; some of them were Hungarians, while others were Germans from Austria. Maria Theresa, a ruler of deep piety, founded nine new dioceses, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic alike, during the 1770s. The growth of monastic orders, including the Jesuits, the Piarists, the Franciscans, and the Paulites, among others, accompanied this expansion. "The Catholics [in Hungary] are very devout," observed the papal legate, Giuseppe Garampi, 1776.⁷⁶

In an apparent but understandable paradox, considering the tenor of the times, the devout queen embarked upon a process of subordinating the Church to state power, which, in the eyes of many Catholic contemporaries, not to mention latter-day followers of the Church,

74 Dobszay and Fónagy, "A rendi társadalom felbomlása," 59–61; Lilla Krász, "A mesterség szolgálatában. Felvilágosodás és 'orvosi tudományok' a 18. századi Magyarországon" [In the service of a profession: The Enlightenment and 'medical sciences' in 18th century Hungary], *Századok* 139, no. 5 (2005), 1065–104.

75 Gabriel Adrianyi, *Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte Ungarns* (München, 1986), 17.

76 László Katus, "A magyar katolicizmus a XVIII. és XIX. században (josefinizmus, liberalizmus és katolikus megújulás)" [Hungarian Catholicism in the 18th and 19th centuries (Josephism, Liberalism, and Catholic Renewal)] in Ádám Somorjai and István Zombori (eds.), *A katolikus egyház Magyarországon* [The Catholic Church in Hungary] (Budapest, 1991), 62.

amounted to its virtual destruction. Given the monarch's goal of absolute rule, curbing the power and influence of a Rome-centered institution, inclined towards demanding the unconditional acceptance of papal authority, was a logical step. "Erastian" would perhaps be the best characterization of Maria Theresa's policies *vis-à-vis* the Church. Although Thomas Erastus, the sixteenth century Swiss Protestant theologian, had never expressed such extreme views himself, "Erastianism" came to signify the dominance of the State over the Church.

Maria Theresa's assumption of the title, "Apostolic Monarch," in 1758 was the first step in her efforts to gain at least partial control over the Church, although, at that early stage and even later, it would be a mistake to call her a firm adherent of "Erastianism." Rather, she gradually moved in that direction, without ever fully embracing it. Her disgust about financial waste that she had detected in affluent abbeys and bishoprics, as well as papal resistance to anything that ran counter to the status quo increased in the early years of her reign. As a result, one of her court officials, Ádám Kollár, wrote a book in 1764 in accordance with the queen's desire, which supported the essentially Erastian-like claim of state suzerainty over the Church. This was followed by a series of edicts, which diminished the number of monks and nuns, closed certain convents and monasteries, reduced the number of religious holidays, and made the publication of ecclesiastical ordinances dependent on the court's wishes.

Joseph II went several steps further, bequeathing the name "Josephist" to his and subsequent church policies. He practically eliminated papal influence by making all contacts of the Church with the pope contingent on official permission. He set up, within the Vice-Regal Council, a so-called ecclesiastical commission to be in charge of administering church affairs. He abolished many individual monasteries and a few monastic orders and established state control over the education of priests. In selecting bishops, following a precedent established by Maria Theresa, the principal criterion to Joseph II was not piety, but, rather, the right kind of churchmanship. Some of the priests welcomed the changes, especially so if they were under the influence of either the Enlightenment or Jansenism, an idea stressing the need to return to a more personal and inwardly holy Christianity. Joseph II perceived himself to be a good Catholic, and he used funds which he had obtained from gaining control over the Church to increase the number of parishes and schools attached to them. A great

number of laymen and priests were baffled and angry at seeing their once mighty Church manifestly diminished. Nevertheless, the essential features of "Josephism," though not Joseph II's reforming zeal, characterized the Hungarian Catholic Church for the remainder of the eighteenth century and afterwards. By 1792, the papal legate, Giambattista Caprara, considered the position of the Church as grim and the education of priests as scandalous, though still better in Hungary than elsewhere in the Monarchy, because the priests there had the right education and lived exemplary lives.⁷⁷

Non-Hungarians dominated two other denominations, the Greek Catholic or Uniate and the Greek Orthodox. Rusyns, Romanians, and some Hungarians constituted the former denomination, which comprised 6% of the total population by the end of the eighteenth century, while the majority of Romanians and practically all the Serbs, 21% of the total population, belonged to the second. Among Protestants, Lutherans, accounting for 8.6% of the total, were largely non-Hungarian, Slovak and German. Almost all the Calvinists, 14% of the total population, were Hungarians.⁷⁸

For most of the century, Protestants were still treated as second-class citizens in a spirit best described by one author as a "quiet counter-reformation."⁷⁹ Petty harassments on the local level augmented official discrimination emanating from Vienna. The Carolina Resolutio of 1731 allowed for only private devotion as an unfettered religious activity. Protestants were allowed to worship publicly only in certain prescribed places, and Protestant pastors were actually subordinated to the supervision of Catholic archdeacons. Conversion to a Protestant denomination was subject to a strict penalty, and, if Protestants were chosen to become officials, they had to take an oath to the Virgin Mary. The result of this requirement was their de facto exclusion from holding offices. In case of a mixed marriage, a Catholic priest had to officiate, and all the children had to be brought up as Catholics.

A second Carolina Resolutio in 1734 allowed Protestants the right to organize their respective denominations. King Charles permitted

77 Ibid., 63; Antal Meszlényi, *A jozefinizmus kora Magyarországon* [The era of Josephism in Hungary] (Budapest, 1934), 14–30; Ernst Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement, 1700–1800* (London, 1973), 80–6.

78 Barta, 115–7.

79 Mihály Bucsay, *A protestantizmus története Magyarországon* [The history of Protestantism in Hungary] (Budapest, 1985), 147.

the election of four Lutheran and four Calvinist superintendents. The crying need to settle vast territories also resulted in treating Protestant settlers, wherever they hailed from, much more tolerantly, at least on the part of the government in Vienna. However, Protestants could not be fully protected against discrimination by local Catholic bishops.

Bishop Padányi was a principal perpetrator of harassing Protestants. He advocated annihilating Protestants in a book published in 1750. Upon protests by Protestant countries, Maria Theresa banned this book, but otherwise, she, too, was adamantly anti-Protestant. Although individuals were not physically harmed, Protestant churches and schools were closed down during her reign, and complaints by Protestants addressed to the Vice-Regal Council were mostly sent in vain.

Although full-fledged inclusion of Protestants in the country's public life was a gradual process that stretched well into the nineteenth century, the Toleration Patent issued by Joseph II in 1781 was definitely a significant turning point. As a result, Protestants could worship wherever there were at least a hundred Protestant families, and they could occupy any official position without having to take a Catholic oath. In mixed marriages, if the husband were a Protestant, his son could follow in his footsteps, and Catholic supervision of Protestant pastors was also suspended.⁸⁰

Educational institutions came under the guidance of the various churches for the most part of the eighteenth century. As the state embarked on the twin objectives of centralization and modernization, educating people from all walks of life and creating a more professional and efficient bureaucracy became an absolute necessity. Consequently, even if church influence were not altogether removed, state control and supervision facilitated the realization of those objectives. The critical step taken in this regard was the *Ratio Educationis* of 1777. An education department, attached to the Vice-Regal Council, took charge of supervising nine educational districts, headed by well-known and influential individuals. They and their inspectors frequently visited the schools. The government stated that elementary education, though not obligatory, was desirable for every young male child. A uniform curriculum was prescribed, and clear divisions were made among the levels of elementary, secondary, and high education. Instructions were given to treat Catholics, the Greek Orthodox, and Protestants as equals.

80 Bucsay, *A protestantizmus története Magyarországon*, 143–50.

In the curriculum for the elementary and secondary schools, what was taught to whom depended on the social class from which the pupil in question came. Still, the subject matters displayed an up-to-date exposition of mathematics, geography, and natural sciences, as well as the inclusion of physical education and playtime.

The country's sole university was transferred from Nagyszombat to Buda, also in 1777. Seven years later, it moved to Pest. By then, it had fourteen departments, and its professors belonged to the country's intellectual elite.⁸¹ Notwithstanding these undeniable accomplishments, social reality more often than not undermined the designs of the Ratio's creators. Illiteracy remained high, especially in the countryside, and no updated instruction could cancel out deeply entrenched prejudices or dispel ignorance about the outside world which only a small number of travelers and students who could study abroad were able to experience at first hand.

The minor triumphs and much more prevalent frustrations characteristic of reforming education in Hungary demonstrated what reforms initiated from above could and could not accomplish in a country where economic underdevelopment coexisted with a highly developed sense of social exclusivity and superiority on the part of the nobility. The Hungarian nobility was deeply committed to its inherited and cherished sense of permanence, even if its members did not use that phrase, but, instead, commonly spoke of preserving their privileges and their traditions. In contrast, the Habsburg rulers, starting with Maria Theresa, represented novelty and change. Although they were harbingers of modernity only in a qualified sense, changes and novelties rupture, by definition, any sense of permanence and open up new vistas. Yet, at the same time, "the Viennese court was not only reformist but also deeply tradition-bound."⁸² Indeed, most royal courts in the eighteenth century, whether they received accolades as "enlightened" or not, were committed not only to modernizing their respective state apparatus in new and dynamic ways, but also to protecting the social

81 Domokos Kosáry, "A felvilágosult abszolútizmus oktatástügyi reformjai" [The educational reforms of enlightened absolutism] in Márton Horváth (ed.), *A magyar nevelés története* [The history of Hungarian education], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1988), 1: 147–57, 194–7.

82 Denis Silagi, *Ungarn und der Geheime Mitarbeiterkreise Kaiser Leopold II* (München, 1961), 2.

fabrics of their countries, which, without exception, were hierarchical in nature, with aristocrats at the top.

The usual result was “an uneasy compromise between the passivity of traditionalism and the dynamism of modernity.”⁸³ Furthermore, it is plausible to argue that the monarchs in charge launched their reforms in order to impose their own vision of permanence—again, without acknowledging this—on a new, up-to-date foundation, responsive to the challenges that demanded an efficient bureaucratic control over societies characterized by growing populations, towns that were often bursting at the seams, increasing trade, and cultural sophistication in varying degrees. In all instances, this new sense of control from above, aiming at stability and permanence, logically derived from the concept of absolutism itself, a system that historically allowed for only those changes which did not alter its self-perpetuating essence.

83 Marc Raeff, “The well-ordered police state and the development of modernity in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe: An attempt at a comparative approach,” *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 5 (1975), 1226.

CHAPTER 2

The Joy and the Agony of Standing Still

THE SENSE OF PERMANENCE

The Hungarian nobility's fervid belief in the permanence of its values and way of life countered continuing fears about the Turks, as well as anguish about sharp religious dissensions. This stubborn and firm faith should have become somewhat attenuated around its sharp edges, at least in its intensity, once life had returned to normal after the defeat of the anti-Habsburg Rákóczi Rebellion in 1711. Yet this was not the case. As Marc Bloch warned us, it is important to remember the role that inertia can and does play in history. In our eagerness to document change "which is not merely rapid but total," Bloch wrote that "we neglect and overlook the force of inertia peculiar to so many social creations."¹ Mental inertia undoubtedly played a role in perpetuating a sense of permanence in Hungary, but anxieties and fears were equally significant.

Old anxieties were revived in the form of a somewhat far-fetched fear of another Ottoman invasion following the surrender of Rákóczi's army in 1711. This fear became the principal reason for the Hungarian nobles to accept royal succession through female lines, a demand posed by King Charles III, and also to follow the example of Croatian nobles in initiating what Gustav Turba called a *Verteidigungs-Unio*, an "indivisible and inseparable" union of Hungary with all the other parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. If this Pragmatica Sanctio of 1723, stressing the unity of the Monarchy, sounded like an absolutist dream come true, it was, in fact, much less than that. The Hungarian nobles, while securing the defensive shield that the Monarchy provided, simultaneously insisted on maintaining their privileges and Hungary's special position within the Habsburg realm, and the king agreed to honor both.²

1 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1961), 39.

2 Gustav Turba, *Die Grundlagen der Pragmatischen Sanktion. Die Hausgesetze* (Leipzig, 1912), 232; István Csekey, *A magyar trónöröklési jog. Jogtörténelmi és közjogi tanulmány* [The right of Hungarian royal succession: Legal historical and constitutional law study] (Budapest, 1917), 226–71; Ferenc Salamon, *A magyar királyi szék betöltése és a Pragmatica Sanctio története* [The occupation of the Hungarian royal crown and the history of the Pragmatic Sanction] (Pest, 1866), 192–7; László Péter, "The Holy Crown of Hungary, visible and invisible," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 1, no. 3 (2003), 421–510.

Fears from internal enemies were equally intense. To paraphrase a poem by Dávid Baróti Szabó, written in 1795, Hungary should wake up and eliminate its viper-like enemies, the king should prohibit the reading of wicked books, which were the sources of all evil, and the old exemplary morality should be restored. Restoring old noble traditions, morality above all, would carry the promise of continuing them into the future.³ Most nobles also feared Vienna's reforming zeal, even though no reforms, not even those eventually pushed through by Joseph II, threatened the essential dominance of the Hungarian nobility in the economic and social arenas. Nor was the assumed adverse impact of foreign examples overpowering during the first six or seven decades of the eighteenth century. Even when they did become quite noticeable during the last three to four decades, foreign models never seriously challenged the economic, social, and political *status quo*. Still, the assumption that they had actually done so or were meant to do so persisted, generating on occasion an irrational, if not paranoid and anguished state of mind by the last third of the century.

The simultaneous need for reassurance was a logical extension of this mindset. To those who entertained no doubts about the permanence of the social order and traditional values, even seemingly inconspicuous cultural changes appeared threatening. Nobles in Hungary believed that only by vehemently opposing most, if not all, changes could moral decline possibly be reversed and their own economic interests and social position and privileges fully retained. These aspects were firmly fused together for most nobles, who perceived social hierarchy and moral values alike as interconnected and divinely sanctioned.

Memoirs by nobles displayed great individual variations, but they all shared in viewing their own lives as cut from an identical Christian religious and moral cloth in an environment that they regarded as essentially unchanging. Count Miklós Bethlen actively participated in Transylvania's politics and was at one point its chancellor. Although Bethlen had not joined the Rákóczi Rebellion, his pamphlet, urging the restoration of Transylvania's independence under a Protestant German prince, brought about his arrest in 1704. Bethlen was tried but not sentenced to further imprisonment. However, he was not allowed to leave Vienna. He completed his memoirs there between 1708 and

3 Zsigmond Zalabai (ed.), *Baróti Szabó Dávid. Jer magyar lantom* [Dávid Baróti Szabó: Let my Hungarian lute come] (Dunaszerdahely, 1994), 58–9.

1710. Bethlen, a highly educated and well-travelled man, was influenced not only by the authors of the antiquity, but also by contemporary philosophers, first and foremost by Descartes. Acute insights and strong political opinions accompanied his frank self-revelations, yet a firm and steady thread passed through his entire work. He stated in the introduction that he began to write his memoirs not to satisfy his vanity but to honor the glory of God. For all his learned quotations from a variety of authors, Bethlen was a devout Calvinist, and the Bible remained his ultimate authority for all things in life.

Cartesian skepticism, tied to a search for certainty, contributed to making him an opponent of religious orthodoxy in favor of Christian love and humility. The principal aim of writing his memoirs was educational; it was done for the moral edification of young people in particular. He admonished them to read books that would, apart from their educational value, divert their attention from vices, such as “playing cards, drinking, obscene talk, or even worse.” He himself had been guilty of these acts in the past, he remembered, but he had abandoned them for the virtues of “devotion to my country, to my religion, and to my official obligations.” Without explicating on them further, it was clear that to him that those virtues were eternal maxims, valid forever. Any meaningful change had to come from within, from the human heart. In all other essentials, to Bethlen, the future would and should be but the continuation of the present.⁴

No one among the memorialists offered a more opinionated and livelier picture of Transylvanian noble lives and customs than Baron Péter Apor. A loyal follower of the Habsburgs, fervent Catholic, and staunch defender of noble privileges, Apor believed that conditions in Transylvania had deteriorated after 1687, when the influx of Germans into Transylvania brought about the spread of new customs, undermining what he believed was the principality’s patriarchal idyll. The contradiction between his loyalty to the Habsburgs and his anti-German stance was more apparent than real, because, especially after the defeat of the Rákóczi Rebellion, most Hungarians learned to separate their political loyalty from their cultural antipathy. After all, the former was

4 Gábor Tolnai (ed.), *Gróf Bethlen Miklós önéletírása* [The memoirs of Count Miklós Bethlen] (Budapest, n.d.), XIX–XXIX, 3–7, 159, 107; Károly Máté, “A magyar önéletírás kezdetei” [The beginnings of the writing of Hungarian autobiographies], *Minerva* 5, no. 1 (1926), 154–60.

grounded both in the recognition of political realities and in the Hungarians' inclination to claim the dynasty as their very own, while anti-German prejudice remained a welcome receptacle to place blame for all perceived ills. Apor described in vivid detail how the old customs of eating, dancing, hospitality, and fashion were morally superior to those now taking their place under foreign influences. He was hoping that his examples of the ideal state of affairs would inspire the reversal of adverse trends or at least slow down the advent of unwelcome changes.⁵

The literary taste of most readers in this period closely corresponded to their underlying sense of permanence. The popularity of the seventeenth century poet, István Gyöngyösi, with his works enjoying constant new editions, grew ever higher during subsequent decades. Although a lawyer by training, he excelled as a born courtier who always knew to which master he should attach himself and when to do so. His poetry was a form of flattery often to mutually antagonistic authority figures. The various plots in his heroic poems, which featured the comings and goings of mostly aristocratic characters, their marriages, amusements, intrigues, and fights, mirrored, on an imaginary higher plane, the manifold activities of his readers within the essentially unchanging framework of a noble universe.

If Gyöngyösi was the favorite bard of Hungarian readers, Ferenc Faludi was their guide in ethics. He, "standing in between the old and the new era,"⁶ was a Jesuit priest whom his contemporaries held in high regard. Faludi was adapting the works of English and Spanish authors to spread their maxims in Hungarian translation. These maxims were directed at nobles, noble women, and noble youth respectively, basically giving the same basic message for all, namely, the necessity of living a good and moral Christian life, wisely and with humility, eschewing anything extreme in accordance with good taste, modesty, and, above all else, harmony.

Faludi's maxims were, at the same time, warning signals against all those changes that he deemed to be undesirable, because they dam

5 Lajos Szádeczky (ed.), *Báró Apor Péter verses művei és levelei (1676–1752)* [The poems and letters of Baron Péter Apor (1676–1752)] (Budapest, 1903), 19–71, 109; Gyula Tóth, *Hadak, hitek, históriák. Elvek és utak* [Armies, faiths and histories. Principles and paths] (Budapest, 1986), 203–15.

6 László Szörényi, "Kalauz Faludi Ferenc prózájához" [Guide to Ferenc Faludi's prose] in László Szörényi (ed.), *Téli éjszakák. Válogatás Faludi Ferenc műveiből* [Winter nights: Selections from the works of Ferenc Faludi] (Budapest, 1978), 409.

aged and threatened this idyllic state of pristine Christian virtues. He believed that the nobility had an obligation to be honest and good. Young noblemen should set aside some time to do some serious readings and turn away from carnal pleasures that “blunt the intellect” and “deplete our strength.” Nor was fancy attire truly important; rather, inner goodness and humility were. “In our wicked times,” Faludi wrote, “religion too was in danger, and the nobility was more inclined than simple poor people to accept false novelties. This was all the more alarming because, whatever vices the nobility adopted, they eventually travelled fast among the poor who tended to imitate their betters.”

Noble women were the most vulnerable to harmful outside influences. “What can we do?” asked Faludi, adding that “the world is a great enemy of ours, deluding and deceiving women.” A great part of the problem originated with how women were educated. Mothers treated their little daughters as if they were only bodies and nothing else. As daughters were growing up, they were spoiled a great deal and became open to temptations while closed to any kind of knowledge. Cheap romances would affect them as if they had swallowed poisonous arsenic, stirring up their thoughts and setting their emotions aflame, a situation that could not be reversed without pain. Persevering in this way would be mortal sin. Much of the new and bad customs were coming from abroad, Faludi claimed, but “whoever apes the other forgets himself. Whoever drinks and eats voraciously and lives in unclean circumstances is bound to lose the taste of what is good at home.”⁷

Transmitting moral values to the population at large was primarily the task of the various churches, but they had palpable limitations for carrying this out. How much of this message could reach the mostly still illiterate or semi-literate serfs who were mired in their everyday struggle for survival? For the more literate public, charismatic preachers could make an impact, but they had always been in short supply among priests and ministers alike. Schools therefore were much more important in this regard, because their instructions reached the impressionable young. Implanting religious knowledge and the precepts of Christian morality into easily malleable minds enjoyed definite priority in schools at all levels.

7 Imre Vörös (ed.), *Faludi Ferenc prózai művei* [The works of prose by Ferenc Faludi], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1991), 1: 29, 35, 43, 63, 74, 151, 139, 140, 141, 172, 337.

Elementary schools came under the direct control of local parishes or local ministries. Religious instruction, including the teaching of biblical stories and religious songs, was at the very center of the curriculum.

The teaching of writing received less emphasis, that of arithmetic even less. The poorly trained teachers in village schools lived in abject poverty. Attendance was irregular and varied according to whether children needed to help their parents in the fields. Some villages had no schools at all, and other schools were housed in a barn or a shed. In many schools, in Somogy County, for instance, there were no furnishings, "no table, no benches, nothing." Even in more developed counties, such as in Veszprém, the relatively large number of schools gave no accurate indication of how many pupils were, in fact, attending them. The situation was somewhat better in towns; after all, those who eventually became artisans or merchants had to learn how to read, write, and count. The dominant language spoken in the given locality was the language used for instruction, whether Hungarian, German, or Slovak.

Both Catholic and Protestant secondary schools added the study of Latin to the still paramount religious instruction. The Jesuits controlled most of the former. Their principal guide reached back to a strict dogmatic product of the Catholic Reformation, the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599. In this system, the study of physics encompassed all the natural sciences and was subordinated to philosophy, which amounted to a constant repetition of Aristotle's works. In 1735, the study of history was introduced in Jesuit schools, but its focus remained very narrow. The *Typus*, a work written by Franz Molindes, a Jesuit provincial, described the aim of studying history as "servicing the religious and moral education. The knowledge of history should convince us about God's wisdom and love, but it also should instruct us to feel contempt for the world, showing us how ephemeral worldly things are and pointing to the examples of how virtue has been rewarded and sin punished throughout history."

The Piarist order practiced relatively more flexibility in its schools. More dependent on contributions than the well-endowed Jesuits, the Piarists established closer contact with the nobility, and they gradually became more popular among the nobles. Piarist novices received their training in Italy, where they learned to incorporate the teachings of Newton and Leibniz, among others, into their scholastic framework. Once back in Hungary, some of them were allowed to expose this eclectic philosophy to their students, but the content of their teaching

merely modified and did not challenge the widely shared religious and moral consensus.⁸

An important part of Maria Theresa's reform activities involved the education of an elite, loyal to the Habsburgs and prepared to perform at various levels of the imperial/royal administration. In addition to the requisite loyalty demanded of this elite, a further requirement was acknowledging the need to serve the common good, the principle that primarily Joseph von Sonnenfels, the queen's trusted advisor, promoted. The Theresian Academy in Vienna, established in 1746, was the flagship school. Many of its pupils came from distinguished aristocratic families, but sons from less affluent noble families could also attend on scholarships, and even a smattering of Protestants did so after 1755. In time, satellite schools of this Academy were set up in Hungary itself, in Vác in 1767 and in Buda in 1778. Although meritocratic practices had already become quite frequent under Maria Theresa, Joseph II went much further. In his edict of 1784, he abolished the elite schools and opened up all secondary schools to students with diligence and talents, regardless of their social origin. This radical experiment was at least partially reversed in 1797 by King Francis I (1792–1835).⁹

The Protestant secondary schools were similarly oriented toward religious and classical education, because they were, beyond the confining external pressures on their respective denominations, under the tight control of their own traditionalist church leaders. Somewhat exceptionally, the heavily German Lutheran schools introduced, occasionally and always cautiously, the educational reforms of German Pietists. These reforms stressed the necessity of teaching secular subjects in order to enlarge the scope of what still remained the ultimate aim, the inculcation of sincere and heartfelt piety into the pupils' hearts. The predominantly Hungarian Calvinists were more numerous. Although some of their schools suffered hardships, owing to official discrimination,

8 Domokos Kosáry, "A rendi-egyházi nevelési rendszer (1711–1765)" [The feudal-ecclesiastical system of education between 1711 and 1765] in Márton Horváth (ed.), *A magyar nevelés története* [The history of Hungarian education] (Budapest, 1988), 1: 109–22.

9 Olga Khavanova, "Elite education and politics: Hungarian nobles at the Viennese Theresianum in the eighteenth century," *Sic Itur Ad Astra* 12, no. 4 (2000), 77–90; Olga Khavanova, "Az apai érdemeket a fiúkban jutalmazni... Az iskoláztatás privilégiuma Mária Terézia uralkodásának idején" [To reward the fathers' merit in their sons... The privilege of schooling under the reign of Maria Theresa], *Századok* 139, no. 5 (2005), 1105–29.

others in such strong Calvinist centers as Debrecen and Sárospatak continued to thrive, because of the support they received from their co-religionists abroad in the first case and from the relatively prosperous Calvinist nobility in northeastern Hungary in the second.¹⁰

The secondary schools were attached to the colleges. In the latter, a handful of professors taught only philosophy and theology. In turn, good college students were chosen to teach pupils in the secondary schools. Calvinist secondary curricula were as much, if not more, restrictive than the ones used in Catholic schools. Their emphasis on Latin was so strong that speaking Hungarian was prohibited inside the colleges. The ubiquitous stress on soulless memorization resembled the very same practice in Jesuit schools; furthermore, students were subjected to draconian discipline. György Maróthi, who had studied in Basel, Zürich, and Bern, revamped the curriculum at Debrecen, introducing the study of geography, mathematics, and the study of foreign languages other than Latin. However, these radical reforms, on the whole, did not survive his premature death at age 29, in 1744. Another famous professor at Debrecen, István Hatvani, brilliantly utilized the knowledge that he had gained at the University of Basel in several disciplines without abandoning his role of fighting against secular influences as a staunch protector of strict Calvinist teachings and morality.¹¹

The most impressive institution of higher learning was the Jesuit-led university at Nagyszombat (Trnava/Tyrnau), founded in 1635 by Cardinal Péter Pázmány. Philosophy and theology formed the bulk of studies at this institution as well, thereby reinforcing Catholic beliefs. The regulations for instruction, based on the 1599 *Ratio*, defined the traditional Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy as their foundation. Although public discussions were part of the instruction, the intention was not to foster independent critical thinking. Rather, the purpose of these discussions was to learn about subtle differences within an abstract corpus of religious thought, unrelated to the natural world.

10 Lajos Némédi, "Die Kalvinistischen Hochschule Sárospatak und Debrecen im 18. Jahrhundert" in Béla Köpeczi (ed.), *Les Lumières en Hongrie, en Europe Centrale et en Europe Orientale* (Budapest-Paris, 1984), 371–2. The wealth of those nobles derived from the wine-trade they were engaged in.

11 Kosáry, "A rendi-egyházi nevelési rendszer (1711–1765)," 126–9; Orsolya Szakály, *Egy vállalkozó főnemes, Vay Miklós báró (1756–1824)* [An enterprising aristocrat, Baron Miklós Vay] (Budapest, 2003), 29–32; Mátyás Bajkó, "Az iskolakultúra" [The culture of schools] in István Rácz (ed.), *Debrecen története 1693–1849* [The history of Debrecen between 1693 and 1849] (Debrecen, 1981), 2, 450, 543.

Starting in the 1750s, Maria Theresa's reforms at the University of Vienna had given impetus to some changes in the teaching of various subjects at Nagyszombat. Although the study of theology remained mired in arid scholasticism, the ideas of Descartes and Newton were increasingly adopted in the teaching of philosophy and the natural sciences, with results that invigorated the curriculum. Among other innovations, an observatory was built in 1753, experimentation was introduced into the teaching of physics, and new language courses were beginning to be taught in Hungarian, German, and French. However, for all these changes, the religious and moral education of young students remained within the framework of an evolving, more learned and sophisticated, but still firmly defined Christian-Catholic universe.¹²

Only a relatively small number of Jansenists could be found among Hungarians. Ferenc Rákóczi was an early adherent after his exile from Hungary in 1711. A few prelates did also support Jansenist ideals. Although Jansenism had originated in seventeenth century France, Hungarian prelates were influenced by it while in Rome, where the Collegium Germanicum–Hungaricum was a hotbed of Jansenism. In spite of its militantly anti-Protestant stand, Jansenism resembled Calvinism by its denial of free will and its appreciation of predestination. In the Hungarian context, however, this theology mattered less than the Jansenists' opposition to baroque piety and its primary representatives, the Jesuits. Most of the prelates, including Archbishop Ferenc Barkóczy, head of the Catholic Church in Hungary, rejected Jansenism: the ones who did identify with it were Ferenc Herzan, Bishop of Szombathely and György Klimó, Bishop of Pécs.¹³

12 Kosáry, "A rendi-egyházi nevelési rendszer (1711–1765)," 117–9; István Sinkovics, *Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem története, 1635–1985* [The history of Eötvös Loránd University 1635–1985] (Budapest, 1985), 33–43.

13 István Bitskey, "Barkóczy Ferenc az irodalmi mecénás" [Ferenc Barkóczy, the literary benefactor] in József Szauder and Andor Tarnai (eds.), *Irodalom és felvilágosodás. Tanulmányok* [Literature and enlightenment: Studies] (Budapest, 1974), 346; Ferenc Tóth, "Janzenista művek a szombathelyi Egyházmegyei Könyvtárban" [Jansenist works in the library of the Szombathely diocese], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 115, no. 1 (1999), 1–9; György Kókay, "A magyarországi könyvtárak és a művelődés a 18. század második felében. Klimó György emlékére" [The libraries and culture in Hungary in the second half of the 18th century: In memory of György Klimó], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 115, no. 3 (1999), 1; Juliette Guilbaud, "La diffusion des idées jansenistes par le livre français en Europe centrale aux XVII et XVIII siècles," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 21, no. 1 (2005), 6.

Closely intertwined with the sense of permanence was the legacy and practice of the classics that permeated all schools and educated households and percolated even to the somewhat less educated, although their spoken and written Latin was less than Ciceronian. "Not only members of the lower nobility but also local village notaries and school masters were often on a war footing with the Latin language," according to one author, "but they of course had to hide their ignorance in their villages where they represented learning." A famous traditionalist poet, Count József Gvadányi, wrote in 1787: "True, he [an imaginary public notary] mixed in many Latin words with his poetry, but that is how they, the public notaries, made it known to their public that they had gone to school." Latin, however poorly spoken or written, was also useful as a "secret" language, deepening the gulf that separated the badly educated from the uneducated. Furthermore, since not even educated women were taught Latin, it became another monopoly enjoyed by men alone.¹⁴

The love for the classics extended to the elites of European and overseas societies that were in one form or another carriers of the Greco-Roman legacy. Apart from but often intertwined with the Christian heritage, links with those ancient, sophisticated, and urban civilizations were lovingly nourished. Practical applications, such as in jurisprudence, could only partly explain this attraction. More significantly, identification with aspects of ancient Greece and Rome created powerful psychological bonds. This remote world was made familiar through frequently using and identifying with various aspects of ancient Greek or ancient Roman life. The totality of those aspects provided such a rich mosaic that many different people could find in these cultures whatever they sought. Traditionalists, reformers, revolutionaries, they all found passages in the history, literature, and mythology of the Ancients that buttressed their particular points of view. Most importantly for traditionalists, whose attachment to the classics was probably the strongest, whatever turbulences had existed in ancient Greece and Rome, and there were plenty, had been superseded by the

14 Quoted in György István Tóth, *Mivelhogy magad írást nem tudsz... Az írás térhódítása a kora újkori Magyarországon* [Since you do not really know how to write... The spread of literacy in early modern Hungary] (Budapest, 1996), 147, 148, 151, 152; quoted in László Négyesy (ed.), *Gróf Gvadányi József és Fazekas Mihály* [Count József Gvadányi and Mihály Fazekas] (Budapest, 1904), 74.

classical ideas of harmony, sense of balance, and poise. These ideas appeared timeless to their admirers, and, as psychological counterweights to anguish, their reapplication to contemporary life undoubtedly contributed to perpetuating a sense of permanence.

No self-respecting noble Hungarian memorialist would have written diaries without peppering Hungarian sentences with many Latin words and phrases. The Hungarian vernacular was still undeveloped, certainly in relation to the French, the evolution of which had resulted in the gradual loss of the significance of Latin in France. Luther's brilliance in establishing a German literary language was not duplicated until the second half of the eighteenth century, when it blossomed again at the time of Goethe and Schiller. This came to influence individual Hungarian literati, Ferenc Kazinczy for instance, but, on the whole, Hungarians resisted German influences because of the widespread cultural antipathy to anything German. For all their grammatical errors in speaking and writing Latin, Hungarian noblemen felt comfortable in doing so. It had its social uses, it projected erudition, it was not German, and it was the language of the *Tripartitum*, the courts, and politics, all the major pillars constituting the foundation of their dominance. For all this, bad Latin was but a small price to pay. The latter-day editor of diaries of the Transylvanian nobleman, György Rettegi, was most apologetic about publishing the author's text in Latin, which he described as "substandard," but at the time, in the mid-eighteenth century, Rettegi had no regrets by jotting it down with abandon.¹⁵

Beyond the use of Latin, antiquity itself was a treasure house of potential reference points. In his diary of November, 1764, another Transylvanian Hungarian nobleman, István Halmágyi, praised the delegates to the Hungarian diet of 1764, delegates engaged in obstructionist tactics in defense of their privileges. Halmágyi thought that their speeches were so splendid that they could have been delivered in ancient Rome at the time when Rome was flourishing. Nor were noblemen the only ones in awe of ancient Roman institutions. For example, the citizens of Debrecen named their governing body "the Senate." Progress in intellectual matters came from the pursuit of old examples,

15 Károly Torma (ed.), "Rettegi György emlékiratai" [The memoirs of György Rettegi], *Hazánk* 1 (1884), 221–3; see also Zsigmond Jákó (ed.), *Emlékezetre méltó dolgok, 1718–1784. Rettegi György* [Things worth remembering, 1718–1784: György Rettegi] (Bucharest, 1970).

Ézsaiás Budai, professor at Debrecen, believed, thinking that this was even more true because valuable thoughts lurked behind the words that all ambitious students and scholars needed to study.¹⁶

This “average” or “school-like” classical knowledge was widespread throughout much of Europe. In addition to imitating ancient Roman, or to a lesser extent Greek authors, other manifestations included the frequent use of excerpts from diaries, catchy phrases, allegories, aphorisms, maxims, and moral teachings. Antiquity’s moral teachings, primarily based on respect for virtue, dovetailed with a strong attachment to the stable universe of Christian morality. Thanks to the past work of medieval scholars, along with Renaissance and Christian humanists, the use of Latin and the veneration of antiquity became important building blocks of that universe. To educated men in the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, the ideas of wisdom, virtue, and happiness spelled a yearning for a closure to confessional squabbles and for the establishment of harmony. It was to that end that the works of Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius were read and enjoyed.¹⁷

The knowledge of Latin, ancient Roman history, and mythology frequently made a powerful impact on individuals, as well as on individual relationships between them. Count Miklós Bethlen, in order to curb his sudden outbursts of temper, decided to follow the examples of Seneca, Plato, and Cato. In an increasingly rational but also increasingly sentimental age, the ties of male friendship could be extremely strong. Allusions to ancient history or mythology often referred to this strength. The young Ferenc Kazinczy was Cato to József Hajnóczy, while Kazinczy reminded Hajnóczy of Aristippus, a disciple of Socrates. The young János Kis and a friend were reading the story of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, and his close friend, Pylades. The example of

16 Lajos Szádeczky (ed.), “Halmágyi István naplói” [The diaries of István Halmágyi] in *Magyar történelmi évkönyvek és naplók* [Hungarian historical yearbooks and diaries], 8 volumes (Budapest, 1906), 4: 149; Ézsaiás Budai, *A régi tudós világ históriája* [The history of the old scholars’ world] (Debrecen, 1802), I, VII. In the opinion of János Hankiss, Latin facilitated Hungary’s task as a mediator between East and West. Jean Hankiss, *Lumière de Hongrie* (Budapest, 1935), 124.

17 József Szauder, *Az este és az álom. Felvilágosodás és klasszicizmus* [The evening and the dream: Enlightenment and classicism] (Budapest, 1970), 110–1; Gerhard Oestrich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge, 1982), 4–7.

this mythical friendship inspired the two young Hungarians to swear eternal friendship to one another.¹⁸

Thus, classicism was not only an architectural style or a literary trend but also the center of a broadly based set of cultural attitudes, a mindset that soaked up classical examples usually in support of conserving traditional values. Selective reading of the classics, including ancient Greek but mostly Roman literature, deepened this support by endowing it with a moral imprimatur. A whole class of Hungarian poets, who became known as the classicists, emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century. The best-known poets in that group, all of them Catholic priests, were Dávid Baróti Szabó, József Rajnis, Miklós Révai, and Benedek Virág. Their pioneering metrical poetry and quarrels over fine points of prosody, as well as the political views some of them quite vocally expressed, lie outside the concerns of this book. Their choices of models among classical authors did reflect both their own individual preferences and the public's taste. These choices were not accidental. The models in all instances were not poets of an individualistic style, such as Catullus, or poets full of irreverence and mischief, such as Ovid. Rather, they were the leading poets of the Roman establishment in the Augustan period, Virgil and Horace. Rajnis translated several works by Virgil, and Virág did the same for Horace. In that, Virág was "a propagator of antiquity's ideals," whose entire life spent in serenity, loving others, and spiritual purity had given credibility to the moral values embedded in his works."¹⁹

Writers or poets who were popular in their own times and were then forgotten, have always existed. Posterity has not been kind to them, as they have become, at best, mere entries in literary lexicons. János Hannulik, another Catholic priest and poet, illustrates this phenomenon. Although he is now ignored, his odes and elegies brought him fame in the second half of the eighteenth century. Like Horace, Hannulik condemned his own times, especially accusing people of lethargy and indifference and simultaneously praising traditional values and ancient simplicity. Like Horace, Hannulik censured greed and

18 Tolnai, *Gróf Bethlen Miklós önéletírása*, 96; Ferenc Kazinczy, *Az én életem* [My life] (Budapest, 1987), 158; János Kis, *Kis János szuperintendens emlékezései életéből* [Reminiscences from the life of János Kis as a superintendent] (Budapest, 1890), 54.

19 Márta Mezei's postscript to Benedek Virág, *Magyar századok* [Hungarian centuries] (Budapest, 1983), 409; originally published in 1808–16.

advocated inner contentment and honest work. To both poets, striving for improving character and virtue was of paramount importance. Hannulík, as a Catholic priest, did not imitate Horace's hedonism or his epicurean poetic adventures, but he did retain his idol's strong commitment to an ethical life, to a life well lived.²⁰

How much of this barrage of moral teachings, based on classical and Christian sources, was truly internalized in the individual lives of its recipients? The reactions of individuals to this literature varied greatly. Some, like Benedek Virág, evidently succeeded in living up to both Christian and classical ideals, while others, such as Baron Péter Apor, tried to do so, at least rhetorically. And many undoubtedly failed either partially or completely. Morality in a society, however, has never been just a matter of individual choices, and social pressures have often run contrary to the realization of an "ideal life." In the Hungarian case, incessant litigations were tearing apart many landowning noble families and presented a major obstacle to the realization of harmony, advocated both by the classics and Christianity.

"There were no landowning nobles," György Bessenyei informed his readers in an 1804 account,

who were not torn and pulled by ten to twenty lawsuits. All properties have numerous heirs... and because of that they are hitting, pounding, scolding, and accusing one another... and in pursuing their lawsuits they travel, correspond, hire lawyers, bribe, make promises, all for the purpose of gaining a few acres of land, even at the price of self-destruction. Their motives are envy and revenge, rather than any desire for material gain.²¹

Young mothers often died in childbirth, and their husbands kept remarrying, with the frequent result that children from multiple marriages were competing against each other. Many noble families had several branches, often at each other's throats over property. Last but not least, upon the liberation of the country from the Turks, titles to certain estates were in limbo. Antiquated legal provisions of landownership made this situation even worse. The *Ius aviticum* or *aviticitas*, first

20 László Varga, *Hannulík János, a XVIII. század Horatiusa* [János Hannulík, the Horatius of the 18th century] (Budapest, 1938), 24–6.

21 Quoted in Grünwald, *A régi Magyarország 1711–1825*, 383–4.

enacted in 1351, considered landed property a royal gift to families and not to individuals. As such, these lands belonged to the given families alone as inalienable properties. Only if a family became extinct would the right of ownership revert back to the Crown. In reality, before this could ever happen, relatives, no matter how distant, appeared from all corners of the country in order to lay claim to any or all parts of the property in question.²²

Lawyers were the obvious beneficiaries of this system, but the study of law carried a far greater importance than merely preparing one for a career in the legal profession, because the upbringing of men in property-owning noble families was geared toward some form of legal education. Already by 1722, one could read an opinion that the sole preoccupations worthy of a nobleman were bearing arms or becoming a jurist. With the former losing its relevance to most nobles, the latter in fact had become the “educational system of noble youth.” Their training was a rather demeaning process. After some schooling, the young candidate began to work as a lawyer’s apprentice, doing a great deal of copying documents and unrelated manual labor in service to the lawyer and his family. After about two years of drudgery, he advanced to the position of law clerk attached to a court or a lawyer’s office. Even those without the slightest inclination of becoming lawyers, like the writer Ferenc Kazinczy, went through this process.²³

Active participation in numerous lawsuits and the obligation to serve the county in some capacity compelled such young men to study law, primarily, of course, Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum*. For centuries, becoming an attorney had not been attached to any school or diploma, until finally, in the eighteenth century, both at the university in Nagyszombat, and later in Buda and then Pest, as well as in the academy of law at Eger, established in 1740, law was taught as a necessary preparation for becoming a lawyer or a judge. But even then, and even after 1769, when the passing of an examination was made obligatory for the practice of law, customary training in lawyers’ offices did remain in effect.

22 Ibid., 385; Vörös, “A magyar értelmiség kezdetei Magyarországon,” 6; Éva H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely a reformpolitikus 1763–1795* [Gergely Berzeviczy the reformpolitician] (Budapest, 1967), 21–2; Szakály, *Egy vállalkozó főnemes*, 49.

23 Szabó, *Jobbágyok-parasztok*, 243; Gárdonyi, “A vármegye és város társadalma” in *MM* 4: 312–3.

Parallel with the exponential growth of lawsuits, the number of lawyers increased as well. While naturally there were outstanding and honest lawyers, others, poor and in desperate competition with one another, resorted to any means to augment their incomes, and dragging out cases was one favorite device. The most famous example between the town of Keszthely and the landowning Festetics family lasted from 1730 to 1848. Lawyers also unscrupulously exploited peasants who were particularly open to all kinds of manipulations. Hungary became known as the country of *prókátorok*, a less than flattering epithet for lawyers. Contempt for them as a group reached a wide audience.

For example, János Kónyi, who wrote during his service as an army sergeant, ridiculed lawyers in his most popular book, *The Always Laughing Democritus*, a collection of rather crude anecdotes, published in 1782. In one of them, a miller implored St. Peter in heaven to find him a lawyer. Upon a thorough search, St. Peter had to tell his suppliant that “there was not a single lawyer in heaven.” A very similar sentiment appeared in the notes of a Hungarian traveler, János Tőkés, who, while in Paris in 1807, admiringly remarked about France that “there is no room here for prókátors’ caprice.”²⁴

Not surprisingly, legalistic thinking became deeply entrenched in Hungary, enhanced by the nobles’ adamant defense of the country’s constitution, which was not a single written document, but a collection of customary laws. It was this legalistic thinking that permeated the arguments Hungarians used in either advancing or safeguarding their particularist claims *vis-à-vis* the Austrians as long as the Monarchy lasted. Adversaries viewed these convoluted arguments, couched in legal terms, as sheer pettifoggery. Indeed, successive generations of civil servants and diplomats from Austria were exasperated by Hungarian legal argumentativeness.

Even more troubling, constant legal squabbles were bound to lead to the coarsening of human relations. The eighteenth century landown-

24 Pál Sándor, “Keszthely város úrbéri pere a Festeticsekkel (1730–1848)” [The lawsuit of the town Keszthely with the Festetics family (1730–1848)] in Gábor Gyáni and Gábor Pajkossy (eds.), *A pesti polgár: Tanulmányok Vörös Károly emlékére* [The bourgeois from Pest: Studies in memory of Károly Vörös] (Debrecen, 1999), 23–32; Lajos György (ed.), *Kónyi János Democritusa* [The *Democritus* by János Kónyi] (Budapest, 1932), 118; quoted in Sándor Fölföldy, *A francia forradalom és a magyarok* [The French Revolution and the Hungarians] (Kolozsvár, 1912), 74.

er, György Rettegi, used angry language as he remembered his dispute with another landowner. "I got terribly upset over the behavior of János Keceli," Rettegi wrote, "who now, by using any means possible, wants to push me out of the area where the mill of Apahíd stands." According to another author, "The history of the Apor family is filled with all kinds of lawsuits, and violence seeped into them like poison and destroyed even their most beautiful character traits." Disorder and mutual recriminations were also prevalent at the diets. "No one pays any attention here [in Pozsony] to what is good," wrote Count Sándor Károlyi to his wife on August 10, 1722, stating that "the delegates mostly engage in faction-mongering and mutual vituperation."²⁵

All evidence points to the high regard that the belief in the need for stability and faith in the permanence of values and institutions held for many people in eighteenth century Hungary. It would be anachronistic to think that squabbling, specifically lawsuits, necessarily filled them with despair, although this must have happened in some cases. Most likely, however, these lawsuits functioned as emotional releases, the same way as sports events do in our own times. Furthermore, pent-up energies could not be spent on running the country; this was, after all, Vienna's prerogative. What was left for the Hungarian landowning elite was to run their estates, engage in county politics, and bicker among each other. Francis Fukuyama speaks of the importance of trust in our own times, as the necessary ethical glue that enables communities to thrive, because in order to succeed they have to depend on mutual trust.²⁶ Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure trust or the lack of it in the present, let alone for a period in the past, it is nevertheless reasonable to conclude that mutual trust in a society ravaged by lawsuits was likely to be in short supply.

Yet, the situation was not that clear-cut in eighteenth century Hungary, where two major trends, both of them inherited from past centuries, put their ever deeper imprint on the collective psychology of the dominant social strata. One was faith in moral and religious ideals, and the other one was the pursuit of self interest, as it was played out mostly in legal and legislative forums. This duality between aggression

25 Torma, "Rettegi György emlékiratai," 120; Tóth, *Hadak, hitek, históriák. Elvek és utak*, 208; quoted in *Diéta*, 127.

26 Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York, 1995), 25.

and simultaneous belief in higher ideals was of course not new in history. As the legacy of the Middle Ages, this duality permeated early modern Europe with the ideas of classical harmony and Christian love attempting to compensate for the abundance of aggression. Often, the most what could be hoped for was at least a modicum of inner peace in the midst of frequent mayhem. The Hungarian case was certainly not unusual, as spirited quarrelling in contemporary Catholic Italy, France, or other European countries demonstrated. The fact that this duality was so dramatically conspicuous in Hungary can be attributed to the powerful historical legacies of both obsessional litigiousness and incessant moralizing, the latter probably the result of a religiously divided society where priests and ministers had been engaged in an intense rivalry for the spiritual health of their respective flocks. Consequently, this duality persevered in accentuated forms in the long-term coexistence of these two seemingly incongruous attributes. Contemporaries could simultaneously live out this duality through a mixture of denial and mental compartmentalization, which apparently did not necessarily preclude at least some measure of reassurance and mental stability. A contemporary satirical poem, known as a *pasquill*, published at the beginning of the 1764–65 diet, expressed this conundrum in a somewhat crude but revealing fashion when it talked about the two hearts many Hungarians possessed, one trying to do well for the country and the other wrecked by personal ambition.²⁷

HABSBURG MODERNIZATION IN HUNGARY

The principal impetus for modernization was the necessity of responding to the foreign policy crisis of the 1740s. Only a centralizing state with an improved system of finances and military organization could meet the grave threat posed by Prussian aggression. Although Maria Theresa was not prepared to govern when she had been suddenly thrust into ruling the Monarchy in 1740 at the young age of 23, she surmounted the enormous difficulties—a nearly empty treasury and a disorganized weak army—with surprising maturity and dignity. She made good choices for her advisors and relied on their expertise and hard work. Count Friedrich Wilhelm Haugwitz and then Count, later Prince,

27 Lajos Abafi, “Magyar pasquillok” [Hungarian pasquills], *Figyelő* 15 (1883), 43.

Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz were in charge of reforms, the former concentrating on the economy, finances first and foremost, and the army, while the latter added reforming education and the churches to the list.

The process of centralization did not take place in a vacuum. As new edicts and new central institutions kept gradually eroding the power of the estates in the various provinces, these estates, controlled by local aristocracies, put up resistance. Central control was not established, however imperfectly and incompletely, until the early 1760s. Hungary, as usual, proved to be a special case, the major exception to the rule. Although the provincial assemblies in the Austrian Netherlands and Lombardy remained relatively powerful as well, neither of them reached the importance that the size of Hungary accorded to its noble-controlled diets. The very essence of the compromise between the Hungarian nobility and Vienna was described as an “uneasy truce between equals,”²⁸ a statement that approximated the true situation. Neither side was willing to take this truce to the breaking point. Nevertheless, a drive for increasing centralization was bound to lead to collisions in Hungary, starting in the 1740s. Posterity was not been kind to the Hungarians, described by later historians as “irresponsible,” “prickily,” “obstreperous.”²⁹

These characterizations did indeed faithfully describe haughty attitudes on the part of many Hungarian noblemen. At the same time, increased centralization in the middle and late eighteenth century was an administrative process that, apart from the rather abstract idea of “state patriotism,” an idea with limited acceptance at best, failed to generate a sense of collective belonging, beyond loyalty to the monarch, in the population. The Hungarians enthusiastically shared in this loyalty, certainly as long as Maria Theresa was at the helm. If they acted selfishly and obstreperously at the same time, this was because they artificially and conveniently separated their queen from her state apparatus, which to them was a body to be grudgingly accommodated at best or disobeyed at worst. Apart from the Belgians in the Austrian Netherlands, who did forge a successful resistance to Vienna, Bohemian Germans and Czechs, as well as Tyroleans, Carinthians, and Italians in Lombardy, among others in other provinces, would have done

28 Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa: The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria, 1740–1780* (London, 1977), 12.

29 Ibid., 8, 11; Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement*, 59.

exactly the same thing, if they had possessed the luxury of powerful local autonomy to the degree that the Hungarians had it. Since they did not, collaboration rather than confrontation was their preferred method of dealing with the central government.

Nor was mostly successful recalcitrance a unique Hungarian monopoly. For instance, well after the Habsburg victory over the Czech Protestants in the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, “Bohemia’s noble estates preserved much of their influence... the powers of the estates over taxation, one vital concern to the Habsburgs, actually grew.” Yet, by the second half of the eighteenth century, although individual Bohemian aristocrats continued to play important roles in the imperial state administration, “nobles as well the church had to pay direct taxes,” and “participation by the estates in administration was correspondingly reduced.”³⁰ This situation was duplicated, to a greater or lesser extent, in all other provinces of the Habsburg lands.

In contrast, the combination of a proud sense by the nobles in Hungary of their historical legacy, their sheer numbers, and the Habsburgs’ reluctance to confront them consistently, at least until the reign of Joseph II, enabled the noble estate of Hungary to grow in power by the second half of the eighteenth century. Their position had been relatively weak in the late seventeenth century, when, in 1673, Vienna suspended Hungary’s autonomy, although only temporarily. Still, the roots of the Hungarian nobility’s eventual rise in power and influence had even then been present. “The power of the nobility was reduced but not destroyed,” Kálmán Benda wrote, adding that “the Hungarian diet in 1687 acknowledged the House of Habsburg’s right of succession to the Hungarian throne, and revoked Article 31... which sanctioned rebellion against the king under certain circumstances... This was achieved... not by royal prerogative, but by negotiation, with the consent of the Hungarian estates.”³¹

No doubt, by the second half of the eighteenth century, strong local power and rich historical traditions made it possible for noblemen in

30 R.J.W. Evans, “The Habsburg monarchy and Bohemia, 1526–1848” in Mark Greengrass (ed.), *Conquest and Coalescence: The Shaping of the State in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1991), 193, 143–4, 145, 147.

31 Kálmán Benda, “Habsburg absolutism and the resistance of the Hungarian estates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” in R.J.W. Evans and T.V. Thomas (eds.), *Crown, Church and Estates: Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, 1991), 128.

Hungary to display openly many of their particularities, including their self-absorption, as well as their exaggerated sense of themselves and of Hungary itself. Those particularities cut both ways, because to foreigners, including many Austrian Germans, the Hungarians were no better than uncouth barbarians. Several previously discussed travelers' impressions, even if they were not uniformly damning, left behind conclusions that explicitly or implicitly associated Hungary with Asia. The British envoy, Sir Robert Murray Keith, set out from Vienna to Hungary in 1774. "In two days' journey from hence [i.e., Vienna]," wrote Sir Robert, "I thought myself removed to the other side of the terraqueous globe among hordes who had originated from as far apart as the Chinese Wall and the White Sea."³²

Although it has been widely believed in Hungary that most high officials in Vienna shared this view, reality was more complicated. It is true that a great many of them found the Hungarians impossible to deal with and did everything within their power to harm them. Queen Maria Theresa alluded to those officials in her Political Testament. Apparently, in the small, six-member strong State Council, established in 1761, Count Heinrich Cajetan Blumegen, Bohemia's Chancellor, was known to be hostile to Hungary, not surprisingly as "they [the Bohemians] stood at the forefront of attempts to administer to the Magyars some of their own 1620 medicine." At the other end of the spectrum stood Count Karl von Zinzendorf, originally a Lutheran from Saxony, who, upon accepting a position at the Court in Vienna, converted to Catholicism in 1764. Zinzendorf was traveling a great deal in Europe, including a lengthy trip to Hungary in 1772, where he inspected economic conditions. His sympathy for Hungary rested on accepting the linkage of freedom to the respect for self-government and existing constitutions, which his idol Robert-Jacques Turgot admired. Other members of the State Council, Egyed Freiherr von Borie and Chancellor Kaunitz, were probably more representative of the official Austrian viewpoint concerning Hungary. Both of them firmly believed that uplifting Hungary would benefit the Monarchy as a whole, but their support for Hungary was conditional. They realized that, as long

32 Quoted in Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy: From Enlightenment to Eclipse* (New York, 2001), 19; Not surprisingly, "few Hungarians played any important role in the affairs of the Gesamtmonarchie during the [eighteenth] century." C.A. Macartney, "Hungary," 132.

as the Hungarian political leadership stubbornly resisted reforms initiated by Vienna and insisted on maintaining all its privileges intact, the aim of uplifting the country would remain a futile hope. Borie became very well versed in Hungarian affairs, to the point that he thoroughly studied Werbőczy's *Corpus Juris*. He believed that, while the principles upon which the reforms rested should stay firm, the manner of execution should be gradual, because "an old prejudice cannot be overcome at once." Kaunitz did not become an expert on Hungary, but he essentially agreed with both Borie's assessment and method of approach. In Kaunitz's words from 1761,

If the great and fortunate Kingdom of Hungary could be given the right constitution, the power of the illustrious ruling house could be doubled. ... Unfortunately, its constitution at present is still such that the welfare of the queen and the country are mutually exclusive. ... The Hungarians stick together like leeches against the court. To our shame we Germans must admit that they often outwit us. They wrap their constitution in a kind of veiled obscurity... gaining the trust and favor of the sovereign without conceding one little bit of their own privileges, which are so detrimental to the state. ... Nonetheless, one must not balk at the difficulties.³³

Relations between the queen and the estates of the realm, reflecting these difficulties, started out badly, only to turn into a veritable love scene in 1741, after Maria Theresa was crowned queen of Hungary. The crowning, culminating in explicit sworn obligations on the monarch's part to defend the country and honor the nobility's privileges, took place amidst great pomp in Pozsony on June 25, 1741. Yet the diet, called together in the spring of that year, was anything but compliant. The delegates confronted the young queen with a torrent of demands that, if accepted, would have changed the balance of power in favor of

33 Evans, "The Habsburg Monarchy and Bohemia," 145; Győző Ember, "Der Österreichische Staatsrat und Ungarn in den 1760er Jahren" in Anna M. Drabek, Richard G. Plaschka, and Adam Wandruszka (eds.), *Ungarn und Österreich unter Maria Theresa und Joseph II* (Wien, 1982), 46–54; Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs*, 66–74; Franz J. Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism 1753–1780* (Cambridge, 1994), 313–4; quoted in Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs*, 59–60.

the nobility. The queen resisted these demands and requested their reconsideration.

The situation remained tense, but then, with a Prussian army in Silesia, as well as Bavarians and Saxons in Bohemia and Upper Austria, the international situation had deteriorated to the point of mortal danger to the Monarchy. Maria Theresa must have felt that she had no choice but literally to throw herself at the mercy of the Hungarian delegates, imploring them to rescue her and the dynasty. She made a personal appeal to the diet on September 11, thereby placing herself and the country under their protection. The delegates enthusiastically responded, offering the young queen their "life and blood." The apparent irony of this situation did not escape a latter-day Austrian historian. "It is an odd paradox," wrote Ernst Wangermann, "that in this desperate situation the only nobles who rose with some enthusiasm to defend the integrity of the Habsburg inheritance were those of rebellious, obstreperous Hungary."³⁴

The irony was more apparent than real. The delegates were all men brought up in a feudal ethos that molded their self-image as sons of a brave and chivalrous nation. When they reacted with enthusiasm to the appeal of a beautiful young woman in distress, who happened to be their queen, they were acting very much in character. Much as later accounts have embellished this scene, it was undeniably baroque theater at its most flamboyant, and it did create a sensation all over Europe. Voltaire, seemingly astonished over the Hungarians' change of heart, relayed the story in his *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*. "They," wrote Voltaire, "changed completely to a spirit of adoration after two hundred years of sedition, hatred, and civil war." Apart from the drama of the situation, its sentimentality also attracted vivid contemporary interest as well.

Already in 1742, the British author, David Lyttelton, had published a book about this event. The author described how "the gallant Hungarians could not see their Sovereign in Distress... all melted in tears... they had now One Heart, One Will, One Voice." Lyttelton's portrayal of this event fused fairy tale with reality, and the combination proved irresistible. "In the imaginary World of Romances," Lyttelton stated, "we read frequently of an Association of Knights to relieve a distressed Damsel, but in the Savage Wild of real History we scarcely meet with a single instance even among the Nations called Barbar-

34 Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement*, 59.

ians.”³⁵ This event briefly softened the image of Hungarians in the west, although their putative principal attribute as barbarians did persist. After all, who could be more alluring, in the eyes of enlightened sophisticates, than a sentimental, chivalrous “barbarian”?

The historical significance of this event is, of course, another matter. Some have belittled and relegated it to the status of a minor historical footnote, especially because the actual military assistance that the Hungarians came to provide fell short of their promises. Others correctly emphasized its extremely powerful psychological impact at a time of mortal danger. Maria Theresa herself certainly did never forget it. She retained a sympathy, admittedly with ebbs and flows, for the Hungarians until the end of her life, in spite of bitter disappointments in subsequent decades, brought about by Hungarian opposition to many of her policies. In a letter written to her youngest son, Archduke Maximilian in April, 1774, she described the Hungarians as “people who, in my eyes, have acquired much merit, to whom I thank my existence on the throne of my ancestors, and who have, during the thirty-three years of my reign, manifested the greatest loyalty and the most eager willingness to support me and to carry out my wishes.”³⁶

The queen’s relationship with the Hungarians diets was mostly quite problematical. When Maria Theresa, still in dire need of assistance, called together the diet of 1751, nothing was left of the flowery baroque sentiments so fervently displayed just a decade earlier. The delegates presented the Crown with no fewer than 122 grievances. The queen, by and large ignoring them, requested raising the war tax from 2.5 million forints to 3.7 million and also attempted to augment the number of free royal towns by four. The delegates rejected the latter out of hand, although at the end, Győr, Komárom (Komárno/Komorn), Újvidék (Novi Sad/Neusatz), and Zombor (Sombor) did become free royal towns.³⁷

In addition, after much haggling, the diet decided to raise the war tax by only 700,000 forints to the total of 3.2 million. The idea that nobles should share in the tax burden, as was already the case in all

35 Quoted in Roider, *Maria Theresa*, 92; Baron George Lyttelton, *The Affecting Case of the Queen of Hungary in Relation Both to Friends and Foes: Being a Fair Specimen of Modern History* (London, 1742), 24, 40.

36 Quoted in Roider, *Maria Theresa*, 77.

37 Jean Berenger and Károly Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie 1608–1918* (Paris, 2005), 218.

other parts of the Monarchy, did not even emerge among the delegates. Instead, they proposed easing the tax burden on the serfs who had to carry heavier burdens because their lords carried none. This was a most disingenuous proposal, since the nobles' tax exemption and the heavier tax burden on the serfs were clearly connected. Furthermore, the less the serfs had to pay to the Crown, the more could be left for their landowners. Although unwilling to relinquish their tax exemption, many noble landowners, engaged in a patriarchal relationship with their serfs, genuinely felt that they were representing both their own and also their serfs' best interests.³⁸ In support of their proposal, delegates presented a long list of what they perceived to be the country's deplorable economic conditions, underlining the difficulties of raising the requested amount and pushing for a smaller tax burden on their serfs. Some of the hardships listed included a plague affecting cattle, invasion of locusts, floods, and discrimination against artisans from Hungary in equipping the army.

The incensed queen did not even attempt to extend Count Haugwitz's reforms to Hungary. "My very name has been reviled," she wrote to the diet, adding, "sorrow fills my heart as I see the estates treat me in a manner never heretofore experienced by any of their kings."³⁹ Although this bitter experience did not totally alienate Maria Theresa from her Hungarian subjects, the luster on her special relationship with them considerably dimmed after this episode.

It would be unreasonable to expect that the queen's advisors, many of whom were already unfavorably disposed toward Hungary, and the queen herself to eschew acts of retaliation. The internal tariff wall erected between Hungary and the rest of the Habsburg lands in 1754 certainly appeared this way. Lowering import duties to Hungary, it simultaneously raised export tariffs on Hungarian manufactured goods. Only agricultural products exported from Hungary to the hereditary Habsburg lands received preferential treatment. The implementation of this tariff was, at the same time, the culmination of a certain mercantilist policy, the roots of which go back to a book published in 1684 by Philip von Hornigk, who promoted the idea of an economically strong unitary Monarchy. Indeed, to those in position of authority in

38 *Diéta*, 122.

39 Quoted in C.A. Macartney, *Maria Theresa and the House of Habsburgs* (London, 1969), 66; *Diéta*, 246–8; Ember and Heckenast, *Magyarország története*, 1: 425–6; Szabo, *Kaunitz*, 320.

mid-eighteenth century Vienna, who believed in both the economic unity of the Monarchy and its mercantilist economic policies, the division of labor between industrializing Bohemia and Lower Austria and agricultural Hungary seemed entirely logical, an idea that was powerfully reinforced by the loss of the rich province of Silesia to Prussia.

Hungary lacked the infrastructure, especially in the areas of “its appalling communications” and “undeveloped resources,” which would have made speedy industrialization an easy or even a plausible task. For Vienna, speed was an important consideration in the emerging competition between great powers in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ Motives do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive, and it is accurate to say that “in treating Hungary as a foreign country, the empress was thinking punitively as much as she was thinking economically.”⁴¹ Vienna’s official policy was, however, inconsistent. It changed in the 1760s, when the queen decided to support industrial development in Hungary, unless such development competed with an industry or industries in the hereditary provinces.⁴² Then, a decade later, in the 1770s, the more stringent discriminatory measures were restored. This change indicated that the policy was based less on some kind of consistent principle or official sentiment and more on political expediency. Vienna’s somewhat ad hoc strategy was designed with the hope that it would coax the Hungarian nobles into delivering a substantial financial contribution to the royal treasury.

The frequently used epithet of colonialism, hurled at Vienna’s doorstep then and later, was at most only partially true, primarily because Vienna had no consistent official policy that any colonial enterprise requires. Furthermore, as both Domokos Kosáry and Gusztáv Heckenast have pointed out, Hungary’s relative backwardness predated the internal tariff wall. According to Heckenast, the roots of backwardness can be traced back to the Middle Ages. He also stated that the economic

40 Macartney, *Maria Theresa and the House of Austria*, 71.

41 Paula Sutter Fichtner, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1490–1848* (Houndsmills–New York, 2003), 70–1; David F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750–1914* (Berkeley, 1984), 29.

42 *Diéta*, 248; Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire*, 16; Gustav Otruba, “Verwaltung, Finanzen, Manufaktoren, Gewerbe, Handel und Verkehr, technisch-gewerbliche Bildung und Bevölkerungsentwicklung” in Hermann Mocker (ed.), *Österreich im Zeitalter der aufgeklärten Absolutismus* (Vienna, 1983), 62; Anton Spiesz, “Die Wirtschaftspolitik des Wiener Hofes gegenüber Ungarn im 18. Jahrhundert und im Vormärz,” *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 1 (1969), 62–3.

potential of various regions was a more significant factor than any kind of subjective decision making. Tirol and Voralberg, for instance, were even more backward than Hungary was. While it was true that textile manufacturing in Bohemia and Austria proper was protected against potential Hungarian competition, Vienna actively supported mining and metallurgy in Hungary.⁴³ Nor was Hungary's situation comparable to the virtually total subordination that came in time to characterize the Asian and African colonies of European powers.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue against the fact that discriminatory tariff policies locked Hungary into a subordinate position. Convincingly to that extent, the charge of colonialism is true. The Hungarian historian Ferenc Eckhart, in a book published in 1922, furnished much evidence to support this charge. Oszkár Paulinyi, reviewing this book, went a step further and accused Vienna of not only having stifled economic development in Hungary but also actively stunting "Hungarians' capitalistic enterprising spirit."⁴⁴ The reason why these accusations are, at best, a half-truth, has to do not only with the lack of consistency on Vienna's part in carrying out colonialist economic policies, but also because these charges restrict the concept of colonialism to economics. "Colonialism is not just any relationship between masters and servants," as Jürgen Osterhammel has written, "but one in which an entire society is robbed of its historical line of development, externally manipulated and transformed according to the needs and interests of the colonial rulers." Colonialism, among other aspects, leads to the imposition of cultural control over the colonized, in Nicholas B. Dirks' opinion.⁴⁵

From these broader points of view, Hungary was definitely not colonized, because the counties preserved their autonomy in administrative, political, and cultural matters as well. Sharply defined cultural differences certainly contributed to the simmering and occasionally

43 Kosáry, 76; Gusztáv Heckenast, "A magyarországi ipar a XVIII. században és a bécsi gazdaságpolitika [The industry in Hungary in the 18th century and the economic policy of Vienna], *Történelmi Szemle* 18, no. 4 (1974), 503–5.

44 Ferenc Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar gazdaságpolitikája Magyarországon Mária Terézia korában* [The economic policies of the Viennese court in Hungary in the era of Maria Theresa] (Budapest, 1922); Oszkár Paulinyi's review of this book is in *Századok* 59, nos. 7–8 (1925), 293.

45 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, 1997), 15; Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1992), 3.

erupting anti-government sentiments among many Hungarian nobles who came to resent their perceived subordination. The nobles refused to accept their responsibility for the discriminatory tariff policies, which were instituted partly because they stubbornly kept refusing to regard their participation in the Monarchy's affairs as a cooperative enterprise. It is not helpful to argue whether the Hungarian contribution to the common expenses was fair or not—according to several opinions it was fair because Vienna only counted the taxes voted at the diets but not the income derived from the free royal towns and the mines.⁴⁶ However, even if that were the case, the rejection of sharing the tax burden at the diets was what really mattered, because it was done conspicuously in public.

The diet of 1764–65 registered a low point in Habsburg–Hungarian relations, producing exasperation on the part of the dynasty and a sense of self-exultation shared by triumphant delegates at the diet. The queen started out on what she perceived as a positive tone, willing to improve upon Hungary's economic development and work towards "the good fortune of her subjects."⁴⁷ At the same time, she proposed a considerable increase of war taxes and also the substitution of cash payment for service in the militia. In addition to the issue of taxes, the question of the militia became another constant bone of contention at eighteenth century diets. Although, in Christopher Duffy's opinion, "Hungarian hussars were perceived to be the finest light cavalry in Europe,"⁴⁸ the court wished to put the country's military potential onto a steady footing and demanded the setting up of a standing army of 30,000, or, preferably, the equivalent lump sum that could finance one.

Instead, the delegates insisted on maintaining the idea of noble insurrection, the calling together of 80,000 armed nobles if the country were in danger. This offer, corresponding with their self-image as

46 Originally put forth in 1773 by Count Karl von Zinzendorf in his capacity as councilor in Vienna's Hofrechnungskammer (office of audit) in Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs*, 66–7; similar views were advanced by Kosáry, 77, and T.C.W. Blanning, *Joseph II* (London, 1994), 114; Franz Szabo thinks that both sides in this debate have overstated their respective cases, and though "total Hungarian contributions... certainly amounted for much more than critics are willing to admit ... the per-capita revenue ratio of Hungary declined about 30% in the course of the reign of Maria Theresa." Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism*, 341.

47 Berenger and Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire*, 219–20.

48 Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa*, 11.

brave warriors, was not a case of evasion. Many Hungarian nobles sincerely believed that they owed their country a sacrifice in blood rather than in money. They had faith in the adequacy of an insurrection. After all, they claimed, “did not all of Europe admire the Hungarians’ willingness to sacrifice in 1741?”⁴⁹ However, in an age of professional armies, the concept of a noble insurrection was an antiquated idea, an illusion with a high likelihood of failure if implemented. This impasse generated accusations. One *pasquill* placed the blame for it on the ministers in the queen’s government, who were envious of Hungary’s liberty.⁵⁰

The queen herself was present in Pozsony and personally put pressure on the delegates, especially on the aristocrats, by wining and dining them. Italian actors were imported from Vienna. Balls and lunches at the court followed each other in rapid succession. All of this entertainment was of no use. To the contrary, the publication of a pamphlet by Ádám Kollár, a court librarian of Slovak background, entitled, “De Originibus et Usu Perpetuo Potestatis Legislatoriae circa Sacra Apostolicorum Regum Hungariae” [The origins and perpetual use of legislative power over the Church by the apostolic kings of Hungary] poisoned the atmosphere even further. In defense of royal absolutism, Kollár attacked the privileges of both the nobility and the clergy. He believed that the all-powerful sovereign could unilaterally tax church properties and legislate without deferring to the diets. Furthermore, in Kollár’s judgment, Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum* merely reflected customary laws for the nobility and did not form the foundation of a fair legal system. Kollár, believing that it was wrong that the entire tax burden was placed on non-nobles, called for a more equitable sharing of this obligation.⁵¹

The outrage of the delegates against this pamphlet was such that the customarily loyal clergy and aristocratic members of the Upper Chamber united with the noble delegates from the counties against it, and the queen felt obliged to prohibit the distribution of Kollár’s work. This concession received no reward. The delegates were willing to raise

49 Benedek Konrád Stefancsik, *Az 1764/65-i pozsonyi országgyűlés* [The diet at Pozsony in 1764–5] (Kassa, 1942), 37–8.

50 Abafi, “Magyar pasquillok,” 45.

51 *Diéta*, 249–50; Stefancsik, *Az 1764/65-i pozsonyi országgyűlés*, 13–4; Maria Vyvjalova, “Adam Franz Kollárs Entwürfe für die Reformpolitik Maria Theresas” in Gerda Mraz (ed.), *Maria Theresa als Königin von Ungarn* (Eisenstadt, 1984), 125–36.

the war tax only by 700,000 forints instead of the requested 1.2 million. Maria Theresa left Pozsony in anger. Although she ruled the country for fifteen more years, she never convoked another diet. While the grievances were not the main issue, the fact that there were 228 of them, some of them undoubtedly petty and annoying from her point of view, must have added to her and her advisors' aggravation.

A constantly recurring grievance throughout the history of eighteenth century diets was one that demanded the transfer of the royal family from Vienna to its "rightful" place to Pozsony and later to Buda. In light of the frequent freezes between the Hungarian nobility and the court, this demand may have appeared and it may still appear bizarre, but it was very much in character for the Hungarian nobility. If they wished to maintain even an uneasy truce, the Habsburg monarchs had to accept, however grudgingly, Hungarian noble privileges. What the monarchs were receiving in return was a deeply felt loyalty. Nevertheless, these nobles felt strongly that Hungary, not the hereditary provinces, was the vital center of the Monarchy. Along this line, these monarchs were acknowledged exclusively as Hungarian kings or queens, rather than as emperors or empresses, even if addressing them took various forms at different times.⁵²

One pamphlet, entitled "Vexatio dat Intellectum," most radically summarized the position of the Hungarian nobility. The anonymous author claimed that the Holy Crown encompassed both the monarch's person and the nobility. Consequently, the monarch could not take away a noble's land, nor could he or she tax that noble's property, because either action would essentially undermine the organic integrity of the Holy Crown itself. In fact, the pamphlet argued, the nobility and not the monarch had genuine historically grounded rights in the country. Latter-day investigation has uncovered the existence of the author, who was none other than György Richwaldszky, a chaplain of Ferenc Barkóczy, the Primate Archbishop of Esztergom.⁵³

It was most unlikely that this pamphlet was published without the Primate Archbishop's knowledge, but then Barkóczy was certainly

⁵² *Diéta*, 135.

⁵³ Győző Concha, "A 'Vexatio Dat Intellectum' című röpirat 1765-ből" [The Pamphlet "Vexatio Dat Intellectum" from 1765], *Századok* 14, no. 7 (1880), 590–7; Dezső Dümmerth, "Mária Terézia és a magyar nemesség" [Maria Theresa and the Hungarian nobility] in Szauder and Tarnai (eds.), *Irodalom és felvilágosodás*, 397–8.

exposed to influence by the estates. He was a prelate of great erudition and a patron of the arts as an archbishop in Eger, where he served before he became the head of the Catholic Church in Hungary. He came to oppose interference by Vienna into the affairs of the Church and the estates. Therefore, it would not be at all surprising if he secretly endorsed his chaplain's writing. Richwaldszky also received support from the poet Lőrinc Orczy, who composed a poem dedicated to him. In free translation, the poem bemoaned the lack of liberty. "Where is it," Orczy rhetorically asked, "only in the wild lowland plains, because the kings drove it out from the castles."⁵⁴

A closer look at the record would, in fact, show a more nuanced picture. It is true that Kollár's pamphlet provoked universal condemnation at the diet, and members of the Upper Chamber were the ones who suggested the establishment of a committee that would subject Kollár's work to hostile scrutiny. This committee repudiated Kollár's charges that stubborn attachment to old customs was imprudent and that faith in the *Tripartitum* was misplaced because of Werbőczy's ignorance and his prejudices. Simultaneously, members of the Upper Chamber displayed a certain degree of hesitation in consistently carrying out hard-line resistance to Vienna. They, while not objecting in principle to the reasons for refusing the queen's requests, nevertheless seem to have sensed the financial exigencies of the state and the need to compromise, because they nudged obstinate members of the Lower Chamber to accept at least some of what the queen demanded. They warned their counterparts in the Lower Chamber of an adverse impact if they persevered in their obstructionism. They also warned that the queen would lose her credibility, that a possible reduction in the army would undermine the country's security, that salaries of government employees would be cut, and that, if the queen's back would be pushed against the wall, even the autonomy of the counties could be endangered. A combination of pressure and cajoling worked, and the partial result of offering more money was achieved at the end, notwithstanding the inadequacy of the Hungarians' contribution from Vienna's point of view.

On the question of the militia, the aristocrats and prelates, while insisting that they had no intention of violating the old laws and privileges,

54 Bitskey, "Barkóczy Ferenc az irodalmi mecénás" in Szauder and Tarnai (eds.), *Irodalom és felvilágosodás*, 341–3.

advocated certain modifications. The resistance to any change in this area was so overwhelming that the Upper Chamber caved in on that issue. And the *status quo* remained. Members of the Upper Chamber were in an unenviably ambiguous position, not for the first and certainly not for the last time. Many delegates from the counties tended to view their counterparts in the Upper Chamber as Vienna's agents, while, from Vienna's standpoint, the very same people were regarded simply as less extreme members of the estates.⁵⁵

This joint adherence to the status quo became the more noticeable as the tensions between the aristocrats and the untitled nobility were growing, starting in the 1730s. Apart from antagonisms over financial contributions to Vienna, the aristocracy's proximity to the court and other centers of power and their cosmopolitan cultural orientation, in contrast to the untitled nobility's provincialism, was bound to generate tension and occasional ill will, especially among the untitled nobility.⁵⁶ Members of this nobility, particularly its leaders, the *bene possessionati*, embarked on a policy of aggression motivated by what they regarded as self defense. Stubborn recalcitrance characterized their stand *vis-à-vis* Vienna; outflanking and simultaneously co-opting the aristocrats and prelates was the method that made this stand an apparent success in 1764/1765. It is also true that the suggestive power embedded in the historically grounded self-image of the nobility was such that certain assertions and images cast a powerful spell over its members, regardless of the groups to which individual nobles belonged and even regardless of their varying levels of culture and sophistication.

“EXTRA HUNGARIAM NON EST VITA”

A self-congratulatory tone emanated from some communications by noble delegates at the diet of 1764–65. One of them, Ferenc Rosty, bragged about the long hours he and his fellow delegates had spent in discussing issues at the sessions, “but God has kept us there.” A pasquill called him “a true patriot.”⁵⁷ This diet signified either the highest, most glorious or the lowest, most obnoxious point in the eyes of those con-

55 Mihály Horváth, *Kisebb történelmi munkák* [Smaller historical works] (Pest, 1868), 387, 388, 404, 410, 398, 411; *Diéta*, 150.

56 Ember and Heckenast, *Magyarország története*, 1: 714–8.

57 *Diéta*, 178, 194.

temporaries who observed the Hungarian nobility's political role. These adjectives entailed praise or blame, and as late as 1953, C.A. Macartney was still thinking in such categories.⁵⁸ It is more important to understand the mentality of those who belonged to this powerful estate by placing them in their own time, place, and system of values, without passing either a worshipful or a denigrating collective judgment on them.

Their mental equilibrium depended on maintaining their own sense of permanence and their own sense of prominence in Hungarian society and the Habsburg Monarchy. "The roots of the Magyar nobles' separatism went deep," wrote T.C.W. Blanning, "deep into their history, deep into their self-interest, and deep into their institutions."⁵⁹ Notwithstanding the occasional presence of progressive officials in the noble-led counties and the slow trend toward the greater inclusion of less illustrious nobles in the corridors of power, the primary aim of the counties was self-perpetuation, with strong emphasis on the preservation of noble power and privileges in their "self-interest," to use Blanning's word. Without the nobles' authority and privileges, their economic, social and political power, feelings of self-worth and very reason for being would have ceased to exist. Their self-justification rested in history. As far as they were concerned, a long and unbroken line connected them to their pagan ancestors, the conquerors of the Danube Basin, to King St. Stephen, and to all the other kings and heroes who had defended their country against foreign invaders in past centuries. Their reverence for old traditions and laws signified their passionately held belief that the past sanctioned the present and that any rupture in their venerated tradition was to be avoided.

In order to prevent such a rupture, any, or, at least, much "contamination" from the outside world had to be stopped. The patriarchal ideal of "*extra Hungariam non est vita*" followed logically from this xenophobia, although this idea was usually implied, rather than explicitly stated, by the nobles themselves. As Andor Tarnai has demonstrated, German and Slovak students, studying at the University of Wittenberg, brought this saying back to Hungary during the second half of the sixteenth century. Then and later, it reflected the "Hungarus" patriotism of Lutheran non-nobles, denoting their attachment to the country, rather than to any particular ethnicity.

⁵⁸ Macartney, "Hungary," 133.

⁵⁹ Blanning, *Joseph II*, 115.

Nevertheless, by the late eighteenth century, the saying had acquired its somewhat more widespread and self-congratulatory meaning as well. A minor poet, József Mátyási, upon experiencing sophisticated conversation, attractive homes, and fine food in Germany in 1792, felt compelled to disavow, in his own words, “*extra Hungariam non est vita*.” To him, they had come to imply ignorance and a corresponding lack of curiosity about the outside world. The attitude exemplified by the saying had already been the target of scorn during the eighteenth century and attracted even more attacks in later years. “The small lands the men from the countryside live on,” wrote József Kármán in 1794, “define their entire horizon. ... When they say the whole world, they mean their own county at best. ... There is emptiness in their heads... [and] the blossoming of talents is hindered by their lazy and wild way of life; ... prejudices, ignorance, and blindness are the consequences.” This and later criticisms were somewhat too harsh, not so much for their not being factually accurate, but for placing the blame for these facts on the protagonists themselves. Given the generally low level of education, economic and social self-interest, and staunchly conservative political stands of most Hungarian nobles, the peace of mind they craved depended on their not being disturbed or even informed by too much outside influence. As Ákos Beöthy, himself a member of a distinguished noble family, wrote in the late nineteenth century, his forbears’ parochial attitude reflected their attempt to attain exactly such a peace of mind.⁶⁰

Looking at the world from a narrow vantage point did, however, distort their scale of comparisons. Self-imposed isolation went together with a sense of grandiosity, based on their own historical narrative of unparalleled heroism. “Our ancestors intimidated the entire world,” Count József Gvadányi stated. Other examples of grandiosity were the frequently expressed idea that the eyes of the world, certainly of Europe, were permanently fixed on Hungary, always with curiosity and at times with awe. Even a well-educated noble and onetime member

60 Andor Tarnai, *Extra Hungariam non est vita... egy szállóige történetéhez* [Extra Hungariam non est vita... on the history of a common saying] (Budapest, 1969); József Mátyási, “Ötvenkét jó napból mulatságos egy óra, vagy frankfurti utazásom 1792-ik esztendőben” [Fifty-two days of fun, or my journey to Frankfurt in 1792], *Széphalom* 1 (1927), 85; József Kármán, *A nemzet csinosodása* [The nation becoming refined] (Budapest, 1981), 14–5; originally published in *Uránia* in 1794; Beöthy, *A magyar államiság fejlődése*, 1: 770–1.

of the queen's bodyguard, the writer Sándor Báróczi, voiced such thoughts in a pamphlet published in 1790. He urged his fellow Hungarians to pass "sensible laws" that would then draw the attention all of Europe.

This inflated sense of being Hungarian came to the fore in many of the speeches delivered even at the 1790–91 diet, where, simultaneously and in sharp contrast to the 1764–65 diet, some reform proposals were advanced. In his introductory remarks, Personalis József Ürményi stated that Hungarian laws were rooted in "eternal permanence," promoting "good morality, piety, and the furthering of public good." He then added, "The entire world is watching us." The Lord Chief Justice, Count Károly Zichy, seconded this idea: "We have an immense reputation in the whole world," Zichy said. "Nations and their rulers are watching every move we make, so it is imperative that we return to the ways of our ancestors." Speeches by prelates mirrored those of the nobility. "Our ancient laws should be made permanent," declared Prince József Batthyány, Hungary's primate-archbishop.⁶¹

Two examples further illustrate the nobility's tenacious adherence to this sense of permanence. One was the fiction of the constitution, a collection of customary laws, in fact. It was László Péter who pointed out that Montesquieu, visiting the diet in 1728, was impressed by the Hungarian noble delegates, an impression that was further enhanced by the events of 1741. Montesquieu believed that he had witnessed a separation of powers in Hungary between the monarch and the estates, in the sense that "the two powers were interconnected yet existed independently side by side." This did flatter the nobility, and Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois*, published in 1748 and translated into Latin in 1751, became "a bible for the nobility." Furthermore, the Hungarian nobles learned from Montesquieu "that what they possessed was a constitution rather than just a collection of customary rights."⁶² By making

61 Négyesy (ed.), *Gróf Gvadányi József és Fazekas Mihály*, 116; Sándor Báróczi, *A védelmezett magyar nyelv* [The protected Hungarian language] (Budapest, 1984; originally published in 1790), 15; *Naponként való jegyzései az 1790dik esztendőben Felséges II. Leopold Tsászár és magyarországi király által szabad királyi városába Budára rendelt s Posony királyi városába átalítetett s ugyanott, 1791dik esztendőben befejezett magyar országgyűlésnek* [The printed proceedings of the 1790–1 diet] (Buda, 1791), 4, 7, 16, 14.

62 László Péter, "Montesquieu's paradox on freedom and Hungary's constitution 1790–1990," *History of Political Thought* 16, no. 1 (1999), 79, 80.

those rights tangible in a constitution and old at the same time Montesquieu established powerful imaginary ties to the past.⁶³ At the 1708 diet, the estates were discussing some arcane financial matter, when a Catholic clergyman had told the Lutheran representative Pál Okolicsányi that he was prepared to support ancient laws, including one initiated by King Louis in the 1520s, which ordered the burning of Lutherans at the stake. Pandemonium broke out at the diet, and the Catholic clergyman was roundly denounced. After all, the imagined past could not be disturbingly different from the present that it was supposed to resemble.⁶⁴

This last example shows how pride and inflated self-esteem were inextricably intertwined with anguish and agony. The sense of permanence was perpetuated not only by a self-servingly creative manipulation of history, but also by vigilance against anybody or anything that appeared to threaten the assumed perennial harmony. The joy that embracing a mindset characterized by an inflated sense of being Hungarian brought to the nobility was simultaneously tempered by fears that threats to this harmony could not be eliminated and by the excruciating possibility of losing their elevated status. The intimate connection between these two effects explains the title for this chapter.

This sense of exclusivity and superiority was by no means a monopoly of the Hungarian nobility. Rather, it was shared by nobles all across Europe. Sir Francis Bacon supposedly said, "Nobles are born to rule."⁶⁵ Even if this saying is apocryphal, it accurately reflected an overriding sentiment among the nobles. One can then further narrow the scope of a search in Europe and look for patterns approximating the parochial mentality of the Hungarian nobility. Three major criteria for this search stand out: first, relative isolation from the mainstream of European social and political developments; secondly, a strong sense of collective heroism projected back to the given country's past; and finally, a sense of extreme defensiveness against real and imagined slights.

63 The perpetuity of this constitution was taken for granted, so it was thought unnecessary to affix the adjective *ancient* to it. This happened later as a reaction to Joseph II's perceived assault on that constitution in the second half of the 1780s. I am grateful to András Gergely for this information.

64 *Diéta*, 127–8.

65 Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein, *Adelsherrschaft und Adelskultur in Deutschland* (Limburg, 1998), 176.

The nobility of Spain certainly qualified. There, the entire nobility was perceived as theoretically one, with the poorest *hidalgo* and the richest grandee alike belonging to it, even though the former was often an object of ridicule. Honor was regarded as more important than anything else, inherited from what Spanish nobles thought were “ancient Visigothic” values. The concept of nobility, the *hidalguia*, “was a perpetual reward for the preservation of Spain,” which implied that the Spanish nobles had their own sense of permanence, as well. Indeed, Spanish nobility, along with a militant Catholic Church, had fought the *reconquista*, the reconquering of Spain from the Moslem Moors. Following the successful completion of that struggle, fears about a Moslem comeback and the putative subversion by moriscoes and marraños, those Moslems and Jews who had, respectively, converted to Christianity but were not at all trusted, continued. Monarchs were not necessarily disdained by these nobles, although very telling was a statement by Benito de Penolosa y Mondragon in 1629. “Being a *hidalgo* is sufficient to say that one owes nothing to the king,” he declared. The encroaching state with its “utilitarianism and bureaucratism of the eighteenth century” was undermining the nobles’ “aristocratic paternalism.”⁶⁶ This process surely aided some nobles to adjust to changes, but others must have felt recurring fear and anguish in even more intense forms.

The nobles in Poland provide another example. “The late medieval and early modern Hungarian and Polish-Lithuanian monarchies display some extraordinary similarities,” wrote R.J.W. Evans. These included strong resemblances between *sejms* and diets and also in the respective mentalities of the two nobilities. True, Polish nobles, the *szlachta*, developed the fantasy of having descended from the Sarmatians, warriors who had lived north of the Black Sea in the third century, while Hungarian nobles flaunted their extraction from the Huns. In both cases, their “noble patriotism was exclusive, atavistic and ritualized.”⁶⁷ Other similarities included the reverence both the Hungarian nobility and the *szlachta* had shown for their representative

66 I.A.A. Thompson, “The nobility in Spain, 1600–1800” in H.M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 2 volumes (London, 1994), 1: 174, 177, 178, 184, 231, 235.

67 R.J.W. Evans, “The Polish–Lithuanian monarchy in international context” in Richard Butterwick (ed.), *The Polish–Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, c. 1500–1795* (New York, 2001), 29–30.

institutions and the law, as well as the fact that they both “drew in on themselves” in the eighteenth century. In the Hungarian case, this involved a defensive posture against threatening changes that the nobility felt were coming from the west. The Polish reaction had more to do with the multiple adversities that had afflicted Poland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resulting in anarchical conditions at times.

In both instances, the bulk of these nobles resolutely defended their privileges, their “golden freedom,” as the Poles called it.⁶⁸ The *szlachta*’s belief that the Sarmatians had been conquerors filled Polish nobles with a powerful sense of superiority not only *vis-à-vis* the huge serf population in Poland itself, but also over other nations. This feeling resulted in a great deal of “theatricality... in a colorful and oriental guise in dress, rhetoric, and manners,” which in turn gave a lasting cultural unity to the *szlachta* across the Commonwealth. However, the Polish nobility proved incapable of adapting to changing circumstances, becoming inseparable from the ‘golden freedom’ and intolerant Catholicism.”⁶⁹ In Hungary as well as in Poland, nobles entertained a grandiose vision of themselves, while, at the same time, they were both afraid that their noble universe could be undermined and subverted by internal and external adversaries alike.

For all these similarities, considerable differences existed between the situations of the nobility in Hungary and Poland. The occasional baroque exuberance in Hungary was no match for the relentless Sarmatian excesses in Poland. Nor was the republicanism of the *szlachta* a stabilizing step, as opposed to the monarchism of the Hungarian nobles. On the contrary, the odd fusion of Polish privileges, rooted in the Middle Ages, with the republican idea of civic virtues, borrowed from the ancient world, were in fact leading to “phases of stagnation and then decay.”⁷⁰ Polish nobles revered both their institutions and the law, but their support for the monarchy held only as long as their kings remained weak.⁷¹ Consequently, the Polish state declined, while the loyalty of the Hungarian nobility to their monarchs was strong, not-

68 Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty’s Folly: The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1697–1795* (London, 1991), 86, 88.

69 Richard Butterwick, *Poland’s Last King and English Culture: Stanislaw August Poniatowski, 1732–1798* (Oxford, 1998), 26.

70 Ibid., 5.

71 Lukowski, *Liberty’s Folly*, 86.

withstanding their problematic egocentric obstinacy and the few exceptions during the reigns of Joseph II and Leopold II, which did end up by strengthening the state. These results were the opposite of what the form of the two states might predict: the Polish state was fully sovereign and the Hungarian state was not.

Another major difference concerned varying power relations between the better-off untitled nobility and the aristocracy, although tension and conflict existed between these two groups in both countries. The control of the counties in Hungary firmly resided in the hands of the untitled nobility, certainly by the middle of the eighteenth century. In Poland, on the other hand, the influence of the magnates grew by the late sixteenth century. Only a small number of families possessed this coveted status. Their growth in power further undermined the theoretical equality of the *szlachta*, although the voices of lesser nobles could not be completely stifled as they sustained a steady drumbeat of “anti-magnate feelings within [the] political life of the country.”⁷²

A further difference had a somewhat ironic twist. In the early to middle of the eighteenth century, Poland’s fortunes hit rock bottom. Although the historian Robert Frost denies that the magnate elite represented an oligarchy because of its inherent instability, still, in his words, an “anarchic stalemate” ensued in the eighteenth century, when, by 1721, “the Commonwealth’s international position [was] in ruins, its political system paralyzed, and its economy wrecked.”⁷³ The situation was so dire that a growing number of Polish noblemen saw no alternative to reforms. The reformers were determined to replace the weak elective monarchy by a constitutional one possessing stronger executive power. This movement began in the 1760s and reached its climax with the Constitution of May 3, 1791, which declared the sovereignty of the nation, consisting of all the people in Poland. Although, in reality, the nobility preserved its leading role, “the old, class-based idea of a noble nation was gone forever.”⁷⁴

72 Robert I. Frost, “The nobility of Poland–Lithuania, 1569–1795” in Scott, *The European Nobilities*, 1: 203, 204, 214, 215.

73 Ibid., 216.

74 Robert I. Frost, “Ordering the kaleidoscope: The construction of identities in the lands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth since 1569” in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.), *Power and Nation in European History* (Cambridge, 2005), 219, 220.

In contrast, conditions in Hungary never deteriorated to that degree. Rather, reforms by the Habsburg dynasty and the protection that Vienna provided to that country from any possible foreign threat secured a stability that not even noble recalcitrance could undermine. With the nobles' control in the counties deeply entrenched, the pressure for reforms was far less than in Poland, and, consequently, this nobility could easily persevere in its domination at the 1790–91 diet and after.

THE BAROQUE IN HUNGARY

The exuberant offer by the Hungarian noble delegates to rescue their queen at the 1741 diet in Pozsony was a perfect piece of baroque theater. Yet, it presaged not another flowering of the Baroque, but the beginning of its decline. King Charles III was still wedded to a Baroque with heavy Spanish coloration, but the pomp and ostentatiousness that were integral parts of that style cost a great deal of money, money that Maria Theresa could ill afford. Consequently, she eliminated or cut down the extravagant expenses that she had inherited from her father. At the same time, similarly to many of her predecessors, Maria Theresa became a patron of arts, especially of music and ballet, and she also completed the construction of the great Schönbrunn Palace. The transformation of her governing system into a more efficient bureaucratic administration was not conducive to anything as exuberant as the Baroque, which thrived on monarchical and aristocratic patronage on a grand scale. The latter did continue to exist among rich families of the aristocratic upper crust; in their case, nothing stood in the way when any family chose the path of extravagance.

A good case in point was the fabulously wealthy family of the Prince Esterházy, who carried on the baroque tradition of ostentatiousness on a grandiose scale. People at the time compared their residence, completed in the 1760s in Eszterháza, near Hungary's border with Austria, to Versailles. Their principal residence was in Eisenstadt, in Austria, on the other side of the border with Hungary. Prince Miklós Esterházy, the owner of both palaces, spent huge sums not only on their upkeep, but also on lavish entertainments. He employed Joseph Haydn as his composer and the conductor of the Esterházy orchestra. At times, the prince threw parties for thousands of invited guests. The Hungarian writer, György Bessenyei, was enchanted by what he saw

there. "The glory of our monarch and our nation demanded that Eszterháza become a marvel," Bessenyi wrote. "We had to show that French customs, nourished in Paris and London, could find a home in Hungary, which in turn will enhance the respect our country has among foreigners." A few other aristocratic families in Hungary, such as the Pálffy, Erdődy, Csáky, Grassalkovich, and Forgách families, tried to imitate the grandeur at Eszterháza, but they could afford to do so only to a limited degree.⁷⁵ Still, it was less the grandiosity of individual aristocratic families than the splendor of the court that truly mattered in a baroque society, and the requisite grandiosity was increasingly missing from the court in Vienna.

The Catholic Church, another mainstay of the baroque spirit, also proved unable to sustain the level of its previous extravagance, although individual bishops, such as Ferenc Barkóczy, bishop of Eger and later primate archbishop of Esztergom, carried on a building and educational program, especially while still in Eger, which was unabashedly executed in an impressively magnificent baroque manner. Still, growing state control over the churches under both Maria Theresa and Joseph II weakened that spirit, as did the spread of reform Catholicism, propagated by the Italian theologian Lodovico Muratori, which de-emphasized the external trappings of the Baroque in favor of returning to a more spiritual Christianity.⁷⁶

Nor was the combined impact of the great Hungarian aristocratic families compelling, because, for all their glitter and glamour, they merely presented examples of their own "isolated private lives," rather than models that others could or would imitate. When a well-known traveler, Caspar Riesbeck, took a trip to Hungary, he was struck by the sharp contrast between Prince Esterházy and his neighbors who looked to him like ghosts in comparison.⁷⁷ Certainly, the broad masses of the nobility did not have the means to cultivate the baroque style, nor were they so inclined for the most part. Classical education and culture instilled in them a yearning for harmony, poise, and a sense of

75 Gábor Tolnai, *Régi magyar főurak* [Old Hungarian aristocrats] (Budapest, 1939), 155–7; Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates*.

76 Meszlényi, *A jozefinizmus kora Magyarországon*, 15–30; Somorjai and Zombori, *A katolikus egyház Magyarországon*, 63–4; György Kókay, *Felvilágosodás, kereszténység, nemzeti kultúra* [Enlightenment, Christianity, national culture] (Budapest, 2000), 11–20.

77 Tolnai, *Régi magyar főurak*, 157; Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement*, 111.

balance, which they identified as integral parts of their cherished Greco-Roman heritage. These attributes sharply contrasted with those of the Baroque, “ornate, florid, bombastic, excessive, and eccentric,” in Rudolf Endres’ formulation.⁷⁸

Historical reality is rarely so neatly cut. Just as the yearning for balance and poise coexisted, often in the same people, with quarrelsome litigiousness, so traces of the Baroque coexisted with devotion to the classical ideals. During the second half of the eighteenth century, both ancient Roman texts and French classical literature were being taught at Catholic schools, and those schools contained a healthy dose of the baroque spirit. Such a spirit was, of course, hardly noticeable in the Protestant schools.⁷⁹ Also, the classicist poets of that time were mostly Catholic priests who were naturally all touched by the Baroque to varying degrees. A similar fusion of style characterized the period’s architecture, where “the richness of the late eighteenth century Baroque during the last quarter of the century mingled with easily discernible Classicist elements.”⁸⁰ Consequently, the overall mentality of the society cannot be categorically characterized solely as Baroque; rather, it was an amalgam with Baroque constituting only one of several trends.

The illusion of Baroque’s predominance derives from a particular proclivity of the Hungarian nobility. Much as their vast majority could consistently afford neither the expense nor the exuberance of the Baroque and lived relatively modest and confined lives according with their classical ideal of simplicity, their self-image as chivalrous and generous seigneurs did motivate them to seize occasions when their natural inhibitions and circumstantial limitations would give way to unbridled, ornate, and excessive, that is to say, baroque celebrations. Maria Theresa and her husband, Emperor Francis, visited Pest-Buda in 1751. “One festival followed the other,” a latterday historian wrote, adding that “bells were ringing, the canons of the fortress were roaring, red and white wine were gushing for the people, music was blaring, and the spectacle of illumination was not missing, either.”⁸¹

78 Rudolf Endres, *Das Zeitalter des Barocks* (Simmelsdorf, 1997), 9.

79 Imre Bán, *Irodalomelméleti kézikönyvek Magyarországon a XVI–XVIII. században* [Literary manuals from the 16th through the 18th centuries] (Budapest, 1971), 99.

80 Anna Zádor, *Revival Architecture in Hungary: Classicism and Romanticism* (Budapest, 1981), 2.

81 József Zoltán, *A barokk Pest-Buda élete* [The life of the Baroque Pest-Buda] (Budapest, 1963), 83–93.

Pest-Buda was the scene of another celebration in 1780, when the country's sole university, recently transferred from Nagyszombat, was inaugurated. The queen was planning to attend but was feeling ill; in fact, she died in that year. Count Károly Pálffy, deputy chancellor, represented her. He arrived in Pest with festively attired noblemen on horseback and richly decorated coaches carrying an archbishop and other dignitaries. They were received by the honor guards of Pest-Buda, as well as delegations of students and professors. Flowery speeches and sumptuous banquets followed.

Coronations were special occasions of baroque exuberance, and so was the memorable event in 1790, when the crown was returned to Buda from Vienna. Joseph II transported it there from Pozsony, after he had refused to allow himself to be crowned in order to avoid taking the binding coronation oath. The loud jubilation that greeted the return of the crown appeared to vindicate the nobility through the restoration of historical continuity, a critical building block in their own sense of permanence. Even the installation of lesser officials was cause for collective festivities. The one for the Palatine, Archduke Alexander Leopold, lasted for three days when he was invested with the office of lord lieutenancy of Pest County in 1791. In remote Zemplén County, the installation of Count Károly Pálffy as lord lieutenant in 1779 took place amidst "royal pomp," according to the personal recollection of Ferenc Kazinczy.⁸² This baroque spirit did at times reach the urban population, but the very fact that it was tied to special occasions meant that its grandiosity was less an everyday reality than an occasional exercise of nostalgia, accompanied by extravagant flights of imagination and frenzy, in lives otherwise simply and modestly lived.

External manifestations of baroque exuberance, both in the arts and in special festivities, were not the sole evidence of the Baroque in Hungary, which was woven into the tapestry of everyday life in a variety of ways, demonstrating that various trends were not necessarily separated into neat compartments and isolated from one another. It was surely not at all unusual for an educated nobleman, brought up to appreciate the culture and the values of the ancients, to enjoy the baroque poetry of István Gyöngyösi at the same time.

In the religious life of Catholics, the power and influence of the

82 Ibid., 98–105; Kazinczy, *Az én életem*, 91.

Church were diminished by encroaching secularism and state interference, and this did make some impact on religious life itself. However, baroque piety still flourished simultaneously among the believers. The veneration of saints, and especially of the Virgin Mary, became widespread in all the lands ruled by the Habsburgs. The belief that St. Stephen had offered up his country to Mary herself, with Hungary thereby becoming “Regnum Marianum,” strengthened this cult in Hungary. Before the Jesuit order was dissolved in 1773, Jesuit education and the Jesuit-led Maria congregations, which were the building blocks of a “Regnum Marianum,” fostered popular piety, along with pilgrimages and religious processions. Even after the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1776, the papal nuncio, Giuseppe Garampi, was delighted over the religious enthusiasm of the masses when he was visiting Hungary. At the same time, he did express his doubts about the reliability of some of the bishops from the Church’s standpoint. The idea of “Regnum Marianum” fostered baroque piety and also reinforced a sense of permanence among Catholic nobles, because it suggested to them that their past was “unified and continuous.”⁸³

The nobility was also dominant in matters of culture, because what most people read in that period reflected, by and large, the literary taste of most nobles. A majority of the books in circulation were books on religion or prayer books. Equally popular were almanacs, containing all kinds of information, which were read by all who could read, including peasants. Poetry, especially the poems of the seventeenth century poet István Gyöngyösi, were also published, and his heroic baroque poetry was still resonating well with Hungarian noblemen a century later. Cheap and popular versions of baroque literature, in the form of trashy books celebrating various heroes and kings, were sold at markets and widely read, as were collections of anecdotes, including one by János Kónyi, who aimed at amusing his readers with a rather crude sense of humor. Humor and biting sarcasm characterized the

83 Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca* (West Lafayette, 2004), 7, 46, 65, 66, 81; Somorjai and Zombori, *A katolikus egyház Magyarországon*, 62; Egyed Hermann, “A vallásos ember a barokk korban” [The religious person in the Baroque period] in *MM* 4: 427–32; László Tóth, “A jubileumi búcsú kihirdetése Magyarországon 1776-ban” [The proclamation of the Jubilee in Hungary in 1776], *Századok* 62, nos. 4–6 (1928), 646–65; Imre Wellmann, “Barokk és felvilágosodás” [Baroque and enlightenment] in *MM* 4: 99.

pasquill literature, which was a collection of topical poems, written anonymously while the diets were in session. Finally, there were baroque novels, some totally fantastic, such as *Kartigam* by Ignác Mészáros and *Etelka* by András Dugonics. The latter appealed to national vanities, while *Fanni hagyományai* by József Kármán catered to the growing taste for sentimentality. *Etelka* was by far the most popular book. It was published in 1788, and the first one thousand copies were sold so quickly that a second and a third edition followed. The story reached back to the times when the Magyar tribes had conquered the country. It was written in a folksy style, and its plot was bizarre and muddled, exemplifying bad history and bad literature alike. However it did bring that period closer to the times of its readers, thereby elevating their pride in what they thought was their history and reinforcing their sense of permanence at the same time. *Etelka* herself was thought to embody the eternal virtues of Hungarian womanhood, while Róka, the evil counselor to the tribal chief Zoltán, came to represent all those who were betraying their nation.⁸⁴

SERVICE AND RESISTANCE

Joseph, already as an heir to the throne and then as a co-regent with Maria Theresa between 1765 and 1780, showed signs of impatience and a marked inability to handle human relationships, including relations with his mother. Their joint rule was stormy, as they disagreed on many points concerning the unification of the Monarchy's administration, the balance between civil authorities and the military, the nature and timing of proposed expansion, and the proper role of the Catholic Church in the Monarchy. In most instances, his proposals were more radical—"subversive" to his mother—than what Maria Theresa had in

84 Zsolt Alszegehy, "A könyv és olvasója" [The book and its reader] in *MM* 4: 485–516; G.F. Cushing, "Books and readers in 18th century Hungary," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 47, no. 108 (1969), 33–77; Géza Fülöp, *A magyar olvasóközönség a felvilágosodás idején és a reformkorban* [The Hungarian reading public at the time of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reform] (Budapest, 1978), 24–8; Adorján Kulcsár, *Olvasóközönségünk 1800 táján* [Our reading public around 1800] (Budapest, 1943), 31–69; József Szauder, *Az este és az álom*, 136–55; Dezső Kerecsényi (ed.), *Régi magyar próza* [Old Hungarian prose] (Budapest, 1934), 461.

mind. She died in November, 1780. Ruling alone finally gave Joseph II the opportunity to realize his plans, based on his rational vision of a centralized realm where “tradition and treaty rights counted for nothing.” As he wrote in 1784, “I weakened the deeply rooted prejudices by enlightenment and defeated them by my proofs; I tried to inculcate into every office of the state the love I feel towards the common good.” He truly and sincerely meant this, but he also expected “all right-thinking citizens to display an equal commitment.” This was, of course, an illusion, because, for most of his subjects, “traditional sectional habits and loyalties” prevailed over any kind of abstract blueprint. Maria Theresa was genial and frequently accommodating, but her son was rigid and egocentric. Joseph II was filled with good intentions to do the very best for his subjects, working for that goal tirelessly and with seemingly inexhaustible energy, but his egocentric *modus operandi* assumed that he was always the one who knew what was best for everybody.⁸⁵

Even before Joseph II’s centralization caused havoc in the Austrian Netherlands by 1788, Hungary had proved to be a hard nut to crack, because governing it was based on a dualist principle, a collaboration between the ruler and the estates. This principle remained in effect even when no diet was convoked, as was the case between 1764/65 and 1790. To the vast majority of the nobility, the looming “threat” of being eventually taxed—and the census of 1784 appeared to them as a menacing signal—caused great alarm. Although Joseph II’s Patent of Toleration in 1781, granting freedom of religious rights to Protestants was welcomed by many, even some Catholics, other edicts, such as the one making German the official language of the country in 1784 and another abolishing county autonomy and replacing it with the establishment of ten administrative districts in 1785, created a reaction that Horst Haselsteiner compared to the “bursting of a dam.”⁸⁶ This ferment was bordering on insubordination, and, by the end of Joseph II’s rule, a nearly open rebellion. According to Max Weber, “the basic legitimations of domination” are the authority derived from tradition, legality,

85 Blanning, *Joseph II*, 115; quoted in Andor Csizmadia (ed.), *Bürokrácia és közigazgatási reformok Magyarországon* [Bureaucracy and administrative reforms in Hungary] (Budapest, 1979), 114; R.J.W. Evans, “Joseph II and nationality in Habsburg lands” in Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 134–5; 140–1.

86 Horst Haselsteiner, *Joseph II und die Komitate Ungarns. Herrschenrecht und ständischen Konstitutionalismus* (Wien, 1983), 204.

and the leader's charisma. Joseph II tried and in part succeeded in dismantling the first and failed to generate the third by his overemphasis on sheer rationality. He kept his hold only on legality, but even this became transitory, because he felt compelled to withdraw most of his edicts shortly before he died in 1790.⁸⁷

Joseph II had been aided in his efforts by Hungarians, although the ranks of his Hungarian collaborators suffered a rapid rate of attrition as his plans were becoming increasingly radical. The policy to co-opt as many Hungarians as possible by employing them at various levels of authority had started already in earnest by Maria Theresa. The response was often obliging; after all, loyalty to most of these officials signified loyalty to their king or queen, who, in their eyes, was Hungarian by virtue of the office and the coronation oath. Serving Joseph II did create difficulties, because he refused to take the coronation oath. Such an omission was overlooked by many of those who served under him and had faith in the benefits of his enlightened reforms. Nevertheless, only a few Hungarian officials assimilated so completely to the Viennese court environment that they lost all sense of affinity with their fellow countrymen, even though "we find very few Hungarians in purely 'Austrian' jobs... hardly any served in the civil administration."⁸⁸ József Izdenczy was one Hungarian official who was totally slavish in his loyalty to the court. In a pamphlet published in 1790, he asserted that Hungary had always been an absolutist monarchy and, therefore, that the monarchs could always make laws without the consent of the estates. These views were unacceptable in Hungary, making Izdenczy most unpopular among his compatriots. He also had a reputation of being rude to Hungarians who visited him in Vienna and preferred to be in the company of other officials who were "German gentlemen."⁸⁹

87 Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1959), 78–9.

88 Evans, "Maria Theresa and Hungary," 29.

89 Anonymous [József Izdenczy], *Irrtümer in den Begriffen der meisten Ungarn von der Staatsverfassung Ihres Vaterlandes, und von den Rechten ihre Könige* (Romischen Reiche, 1790), 79, 80, 90; Ferenc Strada, "Izdenczy József, az Államtanács első magyar tagja" [József Izdenczy, the first Hungarian member of the State Council], *Bécsi Magyar Intézet Évkönyve* 10 (1940): 142–9; Imre Madzsar (ed.), *Farádi Vörös Ignác visszaemlékezései az 1778–1822. évekről* [The recollections of Ignác Farádi Vörös of the years between 1778 and 1822] (Budapest, 1927), 148–9.

The majority of Hungarian officials kept walking a fine line between their loyalty to the monarch, on one hand, and their commitment to some form or degree of Hungarian separatism, on the other. A characteristic representative of this group was József Ürményi, who rose high into officialdom. Notwithstanding his steadfast loyalty to the crown, Ürményi became a master at trying to reconcile this loyalty with his safe-guarding of special Hungarian interests. As one of the architects of the Ratio Educationis of 1777, he resisted applying the monarchy-wide uniform educational system that Queen Maria Theresa advocated, and he, again along with others, successfully worked out one that included specific Hungarian requirements. Instrumental in the university's move from Nagyszombat to Buda, he took an active part in elevating its scholarly standards. When confronted by Joseph II's radical reforms, Ürményi conceded the necessity of some reforms, but he also strongly defended the country's "ancient constitution." Rather than resigning as others did, he stayed in office during those years by executing a series of complicated maneuvers, compromises, and evasions, and employing passive resistance. He was savagely attacked as a lackey of the Habsburgs at the 1790–91 diet, even though he again defended noble privileges. Entangled in two conflicting worlds, Ürményi stayed in royal service until 1795, when he was let go as the result of Izdenczy's intrigues.⁹⁰

Countless others who started out as vehement defenders of the "ancient constitution" ended up on Vienna's side, as the result of forceful persuasion, flattery, or just plain bribery on occasion. In those efforts, the court, as the dispenser of titles and offices, clearly had the upper hand. In addition, government bureaucracies provided secure employment for many noblemen. The record of this royal bureaucracy was decidedly mixed. For all its dedication, loyalty, and accomplishments, administrative centralism, even in its relatively benign form under Maria Theresa, let alone under Joseph II's harsher variant, was irreconcilable with the Hungarians' insistence on their autonomy and their determination to preserve their various prerogatives and privileges. At best, an uneasy truce could assure some kind of continuity, as

90 István Soós, "Ürményi József (1741–1825)" in Elemér Kelemen (ed.), *Az oktatási törvénykezés hazai történetéből. Évfordulók, események* [From the history of educational legislation: Anniversaries and events] (Budapest, 1992), 14–27, 22.

the nineteenth and early twentieth century history of the Monarchy later demonstrated. That is, parity proved to be elusive in 1848 and even after 1867, when a theoretically perfect symmetrical solution was found, complete equilibrium eluded both parties.

The bulk of the Hungarian nobility had become deeply entrenched in its own particularisms. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the use of the national language and Hungarian culture both became more robust, and the ideas of the Enlightenment spread to Hungary. These ideas were partially rejected and partially absorbed in various idiosyncratic ways.

CHAPTER 3

The Enlightenment and Cultural Sensibilities: A Comparative Historical Perspective

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In order to understand and appreciate the roles that proponents of the Enlightenment played in the eighteenth century, important questions need to be asked. What motivated them and what were the conditions and limitations that had shaped the character of their practical proposals in various countries? Without questioning or denying the intrinsic merits and significance of the ideas and blueprints for the future that its proponents advanced, this chapter will emphasize the practical-utilitarian aspects of their thoughts, of what they were willing and actually able to accomplish in their respective societies. By regarding certain events in Hungary within a comparative historical framework, this approach will aim at making those particular events as coherent as possible.

The Enlightenment was, in Robert Darnton's formulation, "a movement, a cause, a campaign to change minds and reform institutions," or, in the words of Margaret Jacob, "a movement that called for new thinking about once unquestioned truths and eventually for new actions." Although the degree of this movement's uniformity, or conversely, of its diversity has been a matter of debate, it should not be doubted that particular circumstances played a significant role. For instance, the Enlightenment did represent, in the Habsburg Monarchy, "the reaction against the prevalent forms and ideas of the Baroque," whose roots reached back to the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Although its manifestations were diverse, the Baroque displayed not only splendor and ostentatiousness but also religious zeal and intolerance, as well as close collaboration between Church and State; the individual was definitely subordinated to both.¹ Opposing that, advocates of the Enlightenment championed religious tolerance, intellectual

1 Robert Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth* (New York, 2003), 4; Margaret C. Jacob (ed.), *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, 2001), 1; R.J.W. Evans, "The origins of Enlightenment in the Habsburg lands" in Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 36.

freedom and they fought against superstition, ignorance, and brutalities such as torture. For individuals no one expressed enlightened aspirations more eloquently than Immanuel Kant:

Dare to know—sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding... It is so comfortable to be a minor... it is very difficult for the individual to work himself out of the nonage which has become second nature to him. ... Dogmas and formulas, these mechanical tools designed for reasonable use—or rather abuse—of his natural gifts, are the fetters of an everlasting nonage. ... That is why there are only a few men who walk firmly, and who have emerged from nonage by cultivating their own minds.²

An additional insight by Kant is also very illuminating: “When we ask, are we now living in an enlighened age? The answer is no, but we live in an age of enlightenment.”³ A sentence by Franco Venturi may shed light on this apparent paradox: “Nowhere did [the Enlightenment],” wrote Venturi, “lead to an overthrow of the basic foundations of society or the state or to the creation of durable new institutions. But it did not pass without leaving a profound mark.”⁴ This quote appears to support the point that the ideas of the Enlightenment were significant and they did make an impact, but the odds against their full implementation were unusually high in most parts of eighteenth century Europe.

Kant himself pointed to a particular circumstance of the Enlightenment in politically fragmented Germany, when he distinguished between the public and private use of reason. In the latter, according to Kant, “arguing is not permitted: one must obey,”⁵ echoing an authority-centered and heavily bureaucratic variant of the Enlightenment in the German states. This example shows—with more to follow—that the

2 Quoted in Jacob, *The Enlightenment*, 203.

3 Ibid., 207.

4 Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768–1776*, 2 volumes (Princeton, 1991), 1: ix. Or, as Leonard Krieger wrote, “...changes [in the second half of the eighteenth century] can only be understood if we keep always in mind the integrated structure and the static ideal of society which contained the activities and retained the allegiance of most Europeans until the end of the Old Regime.” Leonard Krieger, *Kings and Philosophers, 1689–1789* (New York, 1970), 117–8.

5 Jacob, *The Enlightenment*, 204.

penetration of the Enlightenment into societies at differing levels of social-economic and cultural advancement reflected differing degrees of possibilities and limitations. Especially in countries where traditionalism was deeply entrenched, the space made available for the realization of enlightened ideas and practices was sparse, as if most of the oxygen was sucked out of the air that might have kept those ideas and practices alive. The more so, because in such circumstances the advocates of the Enlightenment themselves were products of a traditionalist upbringing who continued to live in a traditionalist milieu, where they were rent with inner conflicts between the old and the new, or, more frequently, they were not even aware of having been caught between two worlds. In such cases, the concept of emancipation from nonage, referring mostly to individuals, is insufficient. One may supplement it with words, such as "adopt," or "adjust," that hint at the amoeba-like tendency of Enlightenment-penetration, recoiling from thick walls of resistance but inching into areas where its advocates could find common cause with traditionalists, or where the essential character of society was not called into question. The vast majority of the enlightened were not radicals, let alone revolutionaries, prepared to die for their cause as martyrs, especially not so in the less developed countries. Rather, they were peaceful reformers, who, as men of conviction, sought out an appropriate place for themselves in their respective societies' mainstream.⁶

Among countries of slow development, slow relative to highly advanced England and the Netherlands, one could mention Spain, Poland, and Russia. In those countries, ideas of the Enlightenment were circulating only among small elites, and the strength of traditionalism and traditionalists made the practical implementation of enlightened ideas limited at best. It would nevertheless be a mistake to think that the need to adjust or adopt were attributes of the Enlightenment in comparatively backward countries only, although its relative weakness in those countries made the need to adjust an absolute necessity. In France, notwithstanding its serious economic dislocations, social snobbery, an intrigue-ridden court, and oppressive Church and State control, the Enlightenment reached its apex. Paris was a great and intellectually vibrant city, and a relatively large part of France's population

6 I am essentially in agreement with George Rude, who claimed that "...a nation only adopts ideas that she can find use for; and this depends on the stage reached in her historical evolution." George Rude, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972), 169.

was middle class and literate. As the century progressed, anti-clericalism and free-thinking grew, accompanied by a diminishing respect for the Monarchy. The government blundered into a kind of no-win situation; it persecuted the philosophes enough to alienate but not enough to eliminate them as the perceived threats to the *ancien régime*. The philosophes—"who reevaluated all inherited values,"—were able to fill a void by default, because royal absolutism could no longer control "the language of open political debate."⁷ Nevertheless, their apparently having a widespread access to the formulation of public opinion did not vitiate their need to adjust to specific French conditions, although, of course, the differences, as opposed to Spain, Poland or Russia, were considerable: the ideas of the Enlightenment penetrated French society a great deal more than was the case in the above-mentioned countries. Still, Voltaire, notwithstanding his enormous reputation, moved to Ferney, at the Swiss–French frontier, in 1758, where he felt to be safe. In the 1770s, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon had to defend himself against traditionalists at the Sorbonne, who attacked him for asserting that the earth was older than what the Bible claimed it to be. The physiocrat philosopher, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot's appointment to become France's comptroller general in 1774 ended up as a case of failed adjustment, because cutting down on government expenses, improving the system of taxation, and abolishing monopolies and sinecures among other reforms he had initiated provoked the opposition of so many vested interests that he was dismissed from his position already in 1776. A worse fate struck down his counterpart in Denmark. There, the German-born Chief Minister, Johann Friedrich Struensee, was overthrown in 1772, sentenced to death and executed. Admittedly not only because of the resistance against his enlightened reforms was very strong, but also because of his brazenly open liaison with Denmark's queen.⁸

7 Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth*, 5; Norman Hampson, "The Enlightenment in France" in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981) 45; Thomas Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History, 1721–1794* (London, 2000), 6; Keith Michael Baker (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 4 volumes (Oxford, 1987), 1: xix.

8 Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (London, 1990), 40; Jean-Pierre Poirier, *Turgot. Laissez-faire et progress social* (Paris, 1999), 188–345; Erik Kjersgaard, *A History of Denmark* (Copenhagen, 1974), 52; Thomas Munck, "The Danish Reformers" in H.M. Scott (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1990).

Adjustments to traditionalism or to still powerful royal authorities would not cover the entire spectrum of possibilities. The Dutch Republic was among the most advanced countries in the world from every conceivable point-of-view. Yet, in this case, the pressure to conform to home-grown, specifically Dutch traditions was quite strong. The Dutch placed a significant emphasis on their “organized sociability,” and part of that included their continued attachment to a rationalist Cartesian variant of Dutch Calvinism. Many of them abhorred the radicalism of the French Enlightenment after 1750, and they also detested orthodox Calvinism with its rigid belief in original sin. They yearned for the revival of their glorious seventeenth century, which was marked by characteristics that were typically middle-class, middle-of-the-road, and sober: “Embourgeoisement,” wrote E.H. Kossman, “pervaded the entire population. Its aims were orderliness, respectability, material success, and quiet family life. These formed the main elements of eighteenth century Dutch concept of happiness, and the Dutch valued the Enlightenment or much in the Enlightenment for stressing these practical values.” Margaret Jacob, in one of her published essays, portrayed it as “a goodly Enlightenment.”⁹

Unlike the Netherlands, where enlightened ideas were printed and disseminated rather than formed, “England played a prominent role in the development of many of its fundamental and characteristic ideas.” Yet, “it never had a self-conscious intellectual movement called the Enlightenment.”¹⁰ Memories of religious discords and civil wars were still fresh in the eighteenth century to the point that social harmony came to be highly valued, and the English landed elite was successful in co-opting those who were below them in “the status hierarchy of gentility.”¹¹ There was a homogeneity of cultural values and of civility in England, at least among the educated. It was J.G.A. Pocock who placed the particular English case in a context that turned away from the metaphor of the Enlightenment as a form of emancipation; rather,

9 Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnhard W. Mijnhardt, *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, 1992), 11, 13, 23, 204, 212; Margaret C. Jacob, “The mental landscape of the public sphere: A European perspective,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994), 98.

10 Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1996), 5–6.

11 Lawrence Stone, “The reasons for the elite’s stability” in Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540–1880* (Oxford, 1984), 410.

in his opinion, the English endorsed the country's "sovereign authority and personal security against religious fanaticism and civil wars." Economic development, political stability, social peace, pragmatism and good manners were appreciated, and the state, promoting personal freedom under the Habeas Corpus, representative government, religious tolerance and the inviolability of property seemed to have conformed to such desired values. Not perfectly of course, but to an acceptable degree. Roy Porter branded the English pragmatic, who, while they "espoused Enlightenment rationality did not need to storm the barricades," and Ulrich Im Hof credited them "with a monopoly of common sense."¹² That suggests no essential conflict between the preservation of the *status quo* and enlightened aspirations.

The situation in Scotland was in some ways similar to but also qualitatively different from what had transpired in the Netherlands and in England. Economically still backward, Scotland nevertheless developed a vibrant culture in three of its main cities, Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. The principal vehicles of this cultural and intellectual ferment were the universities and the Church of Scotland, intricately bound together, and they exhibited self-assertiveness and confidence in Scotland's role as "a leading center of learning."¹³ The fact that all that happened in a relatively backward land acted as a spur in this instance. Another factor was English prejudice that prompted Scots "to stick together and advance each other."¹⁴ Moderation characterized the general tone of the Scottish Enlightenment as its general intellectual atmosphere was characterized by "moderation, mutual respect, tolerance, criticism and self-criticism."¹⁵ Still, Scotland produced one of the most radical thinkers, David Hume, who almost single-handedly

12 J.G.A. Pocock, "Conservative Enlightenment and democratic revolutions: The American and French cases in British perspective," *Government and Opposition: A Journal of Comparative Politics* 24, no. 1 (1989), 82–3; Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment in England," in Porter and Teich, *The Enlightenment in National Context*, 7–8; Ulrich im Hof, *The Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1994), 92; Kors, *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 1: 410.

13 Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago, 2006), 61.

14 Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London, 1976), 7; Colley, *Britons*, 123.

15 László Kontler, "The Conservative Enlightenment and the eighteenth century recovery of European self-confidence," *CEU History Department Yearbook 1997–1998*, 124, 126.

carried on the tradition of skepticism from the previous century that had done so much in opening up the floodgates of critical questioning.

As these examples show, there was not one but a multiplicity of enlightenments, to the point of alarming a few scholars who felt that such diversity could lead to confusion. "The Enlightenment is beginning to be everything and therefore nothing," commented Robert Darnton. "Ultimately," wrote John Robertson, "it becomes impossible to exclude any area of intellectual activity except the most obviously reactionary form of thought from the Enlightenment's liberal embrace. But then, if Enlightenment is inclusive, it is in danger of losing any coherent, distinctive, intellectual identity."¹⁶ A good indication of the above may be the claim, made by Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann, that even within one single city, Vienna, there were several enlightenments. The reviewer of Kaufmann's book expressed his skepticism whether the connection that the author had made between some paintings of Franz Anton Maulbertsch and particular enlightenments was truly a valid one.¹⁷ The truth is that the eighteenth century contained a vast panorama of possibilities in it. "There is no single thread," wrote T.C.W. Blanning, "that will unravel the complex tapestry, rather a multitude of frayed ends, any one of which will lead the reader into the web of interlocking, interacting phenomena."¹⁸

CULTURAL SENSIBILITIES

The gradual overthrow of the religiously-based Aristotelian-Ptolemaic universe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton was accompanied by momentous changes, the development of powerful states, which implied the weakening of feudal ties, inherited from the Middle Ages, and the concomitant emergence of growing urban middle classes. Both the states, obsessed with

16 Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth*, 4; John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 16.

17 Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann, *Painterly Enlightenment: The Art of Franz Anton Maulbertsch, 1724–1796* (Chapel Hill, 2006); Internet review in November, 2006 by Thomas Ahnert, University of Edinburgh.

18 T.C.W. Blanning, "Introduction" in T.C.W. Blanning (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Europe 1688–1815* (Oxford, 2000), 2.

power, and the urban middle classes, concerned with prosperity, marked preoccupations that were secular rather than purely religious.

This transition was by no means simple and linear; on the contrary, the religious schism in the sixteenth century, pitting Protestants against Catholics, the militancy of the Catholic Council of Trent, the religious exuberance of the Baroque in many Catholic countries, mirroring Protestant orthodoxy of a different but equally fervent kind, signaled not only the resilience of religious institutions but also the continuing strength of religious feelings. Nevertheless, new cultural norms emerged. With medieval thinking in retreat, certain cultural sensibilities developed that questioned, without in any way abandoning religion, some of the attributes that used to be integral parts of an unchanging and absolute universe. Naturally, there were antecedents already in the Late Middle Ages and even more so in the period of the Renaissance, but an upswing in cultural sensibilities led to demands for religious tolerance, fight against magic, witchcraft, and superstitions, to the growing use and popularity of the vernacular in place of Latin, and to the evolution of urbane, polite and civilized behavioral patterns among the elites that gained some momentum by the sixteenth century only to accelerate by the seventeenth. Those who had participated in these developments were holding diverse views and by no means were they in full agreement as to all of these manifestations. For instance, Jean Bodin in France, in the late sixteenth century, was an early champion of religious tolerance; at the same time he still believed in witches and demons.¹⁹

Cultural sensibilities were in essence the antennae employed by some people in Early Modern Europe, registering the changes all around them. By confronting them in manifold ways, their world was gradually transformed through a variety of accommodations and adjustments, as they, the culturally alert attempted to integrate these changes into their own lives. Naturally, there were also those, and they were in the majority, who disliked the changes. Their cultural sensibilities led either to grudging accommodations or to outright repudiations.

Although the concept of cultural sensibilities may misleadingly conjure up an almost ethereal-aesthetic mental atmosphere, given my

19 Jean Bodin, *De la demonomanie des sorciers* (Paris, 1580); Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, 1998), 63.

broad definition of culture the manifestations of such sensibilities could be extremely diverse and at times quite down-to-earth. For instance, though there was fear that religious toleration would destabilize strong states and tear them apart and would also undermine faith and lead to indifference, practical-pragmatic considerations came to the fore, realizing that religious minorities could not be either killed off, or wished away, or converted. Such recognition was not easy, because there was still “oscillation between a complete rejection of toleration and the espousal of its necessity.”²⁰ Furthermore, the Dutch, the English, and citizens in several German towns, such as Hamburg, discovered that their prosperity was closely tied to their acceptance of religious toleration on the expedient grounds of economic rationality and common sense pragmatism.²¹ Although aversions to denominations other than one’s own persisted, repudiating the criminalization of religious differences gained ground by the eighteenth century, with some notable exceptions, such as the unfortunate Jean Calas whom Voltaire had immortalized.²² The repudiation of witchcraft, magic, fanaticism, and torture had diverse reasonings as well, but the common denominator among people doing so was that they all possessed a cultural sensibility or sensibilities that reflected the incompatibility between such practices and their own self-image.

“Politeness,” wrote Robert Darnton, “lay at the heart of the Enlightenment’s appeal to the general public. Hume, Lessing, Beccaria, nearly all the philosophes except Rousseau identified politeness with prevailing over superstition and barbarity.”²³ Without diminishing their merits in this regard, striving towards civilized polite behavior did predate the Enlightenment as a reaction to a culture of vulgarity and

20 Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (Oxford, 1981), 431, 433; Munck, *The Enlightenment*, 133, 134; Mark Greengrass, “Conclusion. Moderate voices: Mixed messages” in Luc Racant and Alex Ryrie (eds.), *Moderate Voices in the European Reformation* (Aldershot, 2005), 200.

21 Ole Peter Grell, “Introduction” in Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), 6–10; Bob Scribner, “Preconditions of tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth century Germany” in *ibid.*, 37.

22 Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution*, 433, 435; Derek Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth Century Europe*, 14; Geoffrey Adams, *The Huguenots and French Opinion 1685–1787: The Enlightenment Debate on Toleration* (Waterloo, 1991), 201.

23 Darnton, *George Washington’s False Teeth*, 81.

brutality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and parallel with the evolution of more refined tastes and urbanity in the courts and among the educated elites. Norbert Elias placed the emphasis in this process on self-restraint and self-control that aided those who wished to avoid “disagreeable consequences.”²⁴

Cultural sensibilities were significant, because their manifestations filled an intermediary terrain, where educated people subscribed to the ideas of rationality without necessarily accepting the major tenets of the Enlightenment. Naturally, they often could be and were influenced by them which makes the lines of demarcation between the Enlightenment and such manifestations blurred at times. In most cases, however, the separate autonomy of people who were still deeply religious yet they were willing to consent to certain changes was real. That in turn made it possible for the champions of the Enlightenment, who were only a minority among the educated public and even among the intellectual elite itself,²⁵ to have a larger audience beyond their own relatively narrow circle, an audience that could be friendly or hostile or alternately both, depending on what was discussed or proposed. In spite of continuing instances of mutual hatred, growing mutual tolerance and a diminution of actual as opposed to rhetorical fanaticism was to characterize the general atmosphere in the eighteenth century. In such an environment, the unfolding of cultural sensibilities could, on certain occasions at least, provide a bridge between those who were enlightened and those who were not.

For all the similarities and overlaps, the Enlightenment and the manifold displays of cultural sensibilities should not be treated as one. While the Enlightenment was “a polemical movement” that denoted a certain ideological commitment, always aiming at intellectual coherence, at least within each individual case, the manifestation of cultural sensibilities was amorphous, diverse, and largely pragmatic; by far the largest number among the educated segment of populations were hitched to that camp. They, while largely still religious, increasingly repudiated fanaticism of any kind. Robert Mandrou found that between

24 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: State Formation and Civilization*, 2 volumes (Oxford, 1982; originally published in 1939), 2: 272.

25 Behrens, *Society, Government and the Enlightenment*, 154; Darnton, *George Washington's False Teeth*, 77; Jacob, “The mental landscape of the public sphere,” 97.

the two extremes he had named the libertines and the devout, typical intermediary attitudes characterized the majority.²⁶ Secondly, in traditional societies adjustments or adaptations of the Enlightenment to its implacable enemies was simply not possible, because those enemies rebuffed most if not all Enlightenment penetration. Therefore, adjustments or adaptations could take place only in a not entirely hostile, at times even friendly intermediary environment.

There was an explosion of what Blanning called a “a new kind of cultural space—the public sphere,” where, in coffee-houses, reading clubs, salons, academies, correspondence networks, and masonic lodges previously isolated individuals could come together to exchange information, ideas, and criticism.”²⁷ It was like a cauldron where many concoctions were brewing. In such settings, the champions of the Enlightenment in France transcended a merely reactive attitude and did become a forward-thrusting force in areas where they knew that they could make a difference. Apart from declaring broad philosophical principles as hopeful suggestions for the future, they were aware as pragmatists, well acclimatized to their social and political environment, of the severe limitations that determined how much of their ideas they could realize in the “inegalitarian and convention-bound fabric of eighteenth century society.” Primarily, they were able to have an impact in two areas: in the fight for religious tolerance and in reforming the criminal justice system, abolishing torture above all.²⁸ They acted as a lobby, pressuring an often hesitant state, and their pamphlets, newspaper articles, and legal briefs had a great deal to do with torture being eliminated in two successive stages, in 1780 and 1788,

26 Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven, 1989), 55; Robert Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne. Essai de psychologie historique 1500–1640* (Paris, 1998; first published in 1961), 285.

27 Blanning, “Introduction” in Blanning, *The Eighteenth Century*, 4. This narrative follows Jürgen Habermas’ well-known thesis about the emergence of bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century. Blanning’s principal criticism rests on his opinion that the public sphere cannot be designated as bourgeois, because nobles and clergymen participated in it as well. Also, that sphere was not necessarily oppositional as Habermas maintained it. According to Blanning, “It was not an agenda but a space in which all kinds of opinions could be expressed, including those which were supportive of the status quo.” T.C.W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture in Old Regime Europe 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2002), 12.

28 Munck, *The Enlightenment*, 222; Bell, “Culture and religion,” 98.

and religious pluralism officially sanctioned in 1787. It shows the triumph of new cultural sensibilities that even in more traditional societies where the input by enlightened activists was minimal, torture was abolished in Brandenburg/Prussia in 1754, in Saxony in 1770, and in Austria in 1776. That did not mean that enlightened ideas were unimportant. Arguments for a rational justice system were greatly buttressed by the ideas of the most prominent representative of the Italian Enlightenment, Cesare Beccaria, that spread even to Russia and Spain. Beccaria's book, *Of Crimes and Punishments*, was published in 1764 and translated into French the following year; it made an enormous impression in France. Beccaria's humanistic approach to crime, namely that preventing it was more important than punishment, but if that had to be done, it should be commensurate with the crime committed, that torture and even the death penalty should be abolished, all of this awakened great interest, but only his suggestion about the abolition of torture was likely to be accepted because it corresponded with an already reached common-sense and rational conclusion.²⁹

The same could be said of Voltaire and his like-minded friends, who, in essential control of public opinion, acted as a lobby in support of religious tolerance and the abolishment of torture. Voltaire in his treatise on tolerance, published in 1762, "made an eloquent plea for religious toleration." The author of this quote pointed out that Voltaire was "well attuned to the mood of the times," and the timing of his campaign coincided with a general retreat of religious intolerance. Another author went even further, claiming that Voltaire's self-image as the intrepid crusader for justice notwithstanding, he was preaching to the converted as most educated French men and women were already receptive to religious tolerance by the 1760s. Nevertheless, the same author emphasized that Voltaire should be credited by offering the campaign for tolerance a "decisive impetus" through the sheer weight of his public per-

29 Munck, *The Enlightenment*, 151; Dieter Rossner and Jörg-Martin Jehle (eds.), *Beccaria als Wegbereiter der Kriminologie* (Monchengladbach, 2000), 29, 32–3; Michel Porret, "Beccaria et sa modernité" in Michel Porret (ed.), *Beccaria et la Culture Juridique des Lumières* (Geneva, 1997), 17; Antonio Risco, "Presence de Beccaria dans 'L'Espagne des Lumières'" in *ibid.*, 149–67; Haydn Mason, *Voltaire: A Biography* (Baltimore, 1981), 111–2.

sona.”³⁰ The combined impact of cultural sensibilities and of the Enlightenment in France was such, that even the archenemy of Voltaire, Elie Catherine Freron, who defended both the Church and the king’s right to unencumbered absolutism, shared the promotion of certain causes with Voltaire, those of commerce, science, and tolerance.³¹

The model that France presented to the more traditional countries in this regard was powerful but limited in scope. There, new cultural sensibilities did make some headway, and those who were enlightened did make an effort to further that progress. In Spain, Poland and Russia such individuals were surrounded by like-minded friends in small elite groups and various associations. What they collectively lacked was the depth and breadth of a substantial progressive cultural-political background linked to their enlightened ideas, and that is why their impact was generally slight. As the dominant culture in Spain, Poland and Russia was still deeply traditionalist, in none of these countries could these individuals be connected to an enlightenment culture, certainly not in the all-embracing extensive sense as was the case in France.

GERMANY

“The Prussian enlightenment was about conversation... in the percolation through society of this spirit of critical, confident independence, conversation played an indispensable role.”³² One may generalize this statement, referring to all enlightenments, meaning that an ever-larger segment of the population was intellectually engaged in a variety of ways, in salons, coffee-houses, masonic lodges, reading circles, etc., resulting in spirited discussions and in a torrent of writings. Their

30 Julian Swann, “Politics and state in eighteenth century Europe” in Blanning (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Europe*, 27; Mason, *Voltaire*, 99; Derek Beales, “Social forces and enlightened policies” in H.M. Scott (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 42; John Renwick, “Toleration and emancipation: C’est la faute Voltaire?” in Susan Manning and Peter France (eds.), *Enlightenment and Emancipation* (Lewisburg, 2006), 39–40.

31 Mason, *Voltaire*, 95.

32 Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 247.

extent and intensity varied from country to country—in Spain it was small but in France quite large—but the ensuing “public sphere” did become a reality everywhere. Of course, views expressed in this milieu were diverse; the enemies of the Enlightenment were just as prepared to use public forums to expound their ideas as were its champions. In terms of intellectual impact, however, the Enlightenment held the upper hand. Above all else, it was the *Great French Encyclopedia* that set the stage of disseminating enlightened ideas most successfully. “It had a tremendous impact right across Europe. ... Of the 25,000 sets... sold before 1789, about half were to subscribers living outside France.” Diderot’s introductory statement, “everything must be examined, everything must be shaken up, without exception and without circumsppection,”³³ was like a call to arms.

If all that was one undeniable reality, traditional hierarchical society was another one. It would not serve historical veracity to advance excessive claims as to the actual impact of the new ideas. That was true everywhere, and even more so in Central Europe. There, “the break with the past was less sharp and less deliberate than in the more mobile Atlantic societies like France and Britain.”³⁴ Regional, social, economic, religious and cultural differences divided the German states, but authorities were generally not criticized in any of them and they governed by and large unopposed. Such an attitude was rooted not only in the customary obedience to authority in a politically fragmented Germany, but also in the mentality of all those bureaucrats, clergy, professors and others who were active in discussing and writing about issues of all kinds, but who nevertheless understood their participation in public life not as an “exercise of rights but as an ethical-patriotic involvement.” Most of them were in the service of a state and they became integral parts of a “bureaucratic Enlightenment” orchestrated from above. They were also closely connected to the numerous universities, where professors too were appointed by the authorities; there was a frequent exchange of positions between the professoriate and the bureaucracy. These universities often showed a great deal of vitality, but vitality did not mean academic freedom: “the most powerful figure in a German university was the curator, a non-academic bureaucrat who made sure that the interest of the state always took

33 Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory*, 486–7.

34 Krieger, *Kings and Philosophers*, 156.

precedence.”³⁵ Friedrich Nicolai was an enlightened publisher and bookseller. “Heine said,” wrote Amos Elon, “that Nicolai tried hard to achieve in Germany what the encyclopedists achieved in France—the eradication of the heritage of the Dark Ages. In this he could not succeed, Heine added, because the old ruins in Germany were still too solid and too haunted by ghosts, making a mockery of his efforts.”³⁶

The precedence of the state was the key element and in that the German case was grounded in corresponding economic and political theory. Cameralism was the “Central European variant of mercantilism,” aiming at economic self-sufficiency through subsidies and tariff policies. Its political counterparts were the ideas of Samuel Pufendorf, Christian Thomasius, and Christian Wolff. Individual differences among them notwithstanding, they all endorsed the supremacy of the state, with the proviso that the state should serve its subjects’ interest. “The most general rule by Governors: the good of the public is the Supreme Law of all,” wrote Pufendorf, “...to their Governors (the subjects) owe Honor, Fidelity, and Obedience... to acquiesce with Patience and Content under the Present State of Things, not suffering their Desires to wander after Innovations.”³⁷ The incorporation of these and related ideas into the statecraft of German states—even when certain innovations were in fact made—reinforced the essential conservative character of societies in Germany. In the Dutch Republic and England common-sense pragmatism was dominant to such a degree that it subsumed enlightened ideas. In contrast, an amalgam of enlightened ideas and conservative statecraft defined many German states. As the principal carriers of the Enlightenment were in the employment of those states the question was—as always—a matter of adaptability to a traditional society, specifically to the ruling princes and their authorities, but beyond that it was preponderantly a case of conformity to a universally accepted moderately enlightened bureaucratic ethos.

35 Rudolf Vierhaus, “Bemerkungen zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert” in Hans Erich Bodeker and Etienne François (eds.), *Aufklärung/Lumières und Politik. Zur politischen Kultur der deutschen und französischen Aufklärung* (Leipzig, 1996), 449–51; Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 57; T.C.W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743–1803* (Cambridge, 1974), 10–2.

36 Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York, 2002), 39.

37 Fichtner, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 70; Samuel Pufendorf, *The Whole Duty of Man, According to the Law of Nature* (Indianapolis, IN, 2003; first published in English translation in 1691), 215, 248.

AUSTRIA

Although in Austria the situation was shaped by particular circumstances, it was in many ways similar to what prevailed in many of the German states. When Maria Theresa embarked on reforms, a bureaucratic transformation logically followed. To succeed, however haltingly and imperfectly at times, Maria Theresa needed an educated bureaucracy and once she build up one, its tentacles reached deeply in society.³⁸ At the same time, the odds against implementing the reforms fully remained high as local traditions and conservative thinking proved to be recalcitrant. “Baroque habits of mind and baroque artistic forms continued to dominate Moravia for three decades longer than Bohemia.” This quote refers to a diverse development pattern in Moravia, in the crazy-quilt mosaic of the Habsburg Monarchy, but “baroque habits of mind” were inhibiting reforms outside of Moravia as well even if differently in different places. All in all, in Austria, “reform was painfully slow and, by European standards, from a remote starting-point.”³⁹

In all countries that were designated as “absolutist,” the term should be used with caution, as the rulers too were under constraints that limited their scope of actions, because they had to adjust to the realities of their respective societies if they wished to succeed. Contrasting Maria Theresa with her archrival, Frederick the Great of Prussia could be instructive in this regard, because such a contrast could shed light on the different consequences that the growth of cultural sensibilities and the spread of the Enlightenment passed on.

“Frederick the Great is viewed almost universally as the archetypal proponent of enlightened absolutism.”⁴⁰ In addition to his friendship with Voltaire, troubled as it was at times, a host of facts can be

38 Waltraud Heindl, *Gehorsame Rebellen Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich 1780 bis 1848* (Wien, 1990), 17, 62, 47.

39 R.J.W. Evans, “Moravia and the culture of Enlightenment in the Habsburg monarchy” in Grete Klingenstein and Franz A.J. Szabo (eds.), *Staatskanzler Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg 1711–1794. Neue Perspektiven zu Politik und Kultur der europäischen Aufklärung* (Graz, 1996), 384; Derek Beales, “Christians and ‘philosophes’: The case of the Austrian Enlightenment” in Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (eds.), *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1985), 176.

40 Theodor Schieder, *Frederick the Great* (London, 2000; originally published in 1983), 181.

marshaled to support that statement, such as his suspension of torture and reduction of death penalties, acts of religious toleration, compulsory education, and the easing of censorship. These accomplishments were, of course, practical objectives, but for Prussia a case can be made that Frederick's principled approach, principled in these particular matters, added impetus and imparted an ideological content to them. He was at the same time mindful of the need to strengthen the Prussian state in every conceivable way and his aggressive foreign and military policies serve as evidence to that. Furthermore, he was also mindful of the feudal character of that state and did nothing to alter its basic structure. His Code of Law, though motivated by the Enlightenment and progressive in many respects, sanctioned the division of Prussian society into estates, with the nobles definitely at the top. In order to secure their loyalty, the king favored them in multiple ways and he left serfdom on the landowners' land intact, writing with some sadness and resignation, "If one were to abolish these abhorrent practices at a stroke, one would ruin agriculture."⁴¹ He was by far the prime example in Germany of the characteristic fusion between enlightened ideas and conservative statecraft.

Maria Theresa established many of the same reforms, yet she approached matters from an angle that was different from Frederick's as she pursued some of the objectives that stemmed from the new cultural sensibilities, such as the abolishment of torture, without ever abandoning her religious beliefs and fashioning an anti-Enlightenment mindset at the same time. Along with reforms, edicts and laws were forthcoming that strengthened her state; many of such were in conformity to her vision of Christianity that placed the emphasis on inner feelings rather than on baroque rituals. For instance, she condemned superstition by curbing witch-trials, first by her edict of 1756 and then by issuing the Law of 1766, demonstrating the influence of Muratori and the Jansenists. Simultaneously, Maria Theresa retained her deep attachment to her Catholic Church, even as she was prepared to transform and control it. This in turn implied a continuing aversion to Protestants, Jews, and free-thinkers alike. She therefore had to make adjustments in several areas: to assure her natural constituency, the court and the nobility, that reforms would not jeopardize their social and economic dominance, and she had to grudgingly consent to keeping

41 Quoted in Schieder, *Frederick the Great*, 187.

her aversions within bounds. Harshly persecuting any group would have undermined her principal goal of strengthening the state, not by force alone but also by her desire for a harmonious coexistence between the various groups and estates, although she violated that objective at times attested by her harsh treatment of the Jews in Prague in the 1740s.⁴² Still, that is why Bishop Padányi's book, threatening Protestants with extinction, was proscribed, and, after a brief period of prohibiting young Protestant men from Hungary to study abroad in the 1760s, they could do so again from 1766 on. In 1777, a religious strife broke out in Moravia between Catholics and non-Catholics. Maria Theresa followed a policy of "quiet tolerance," at least initially. She also tolerated the freemasons, the more so because her own husband and many of her own advisors belonged to various masonic lodges.⁴³

As a pragmatic ruler, whose aim was to strengthen her state, often against heavy odds, Maria Theresa was eclectic in her choice of advisers, who ranged from Count Christoph Anton Migazzi, Archbishop of Vienna, who started out as a reform-Catholic but turned into a defender of religious orthodoxy from the 1760s on, to Count, later Prince Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg, a thoroughly Francophile statesman, who, though a disciple of the Enlightenment, pursued pragmatic utilitarian policies.⁴⁴ The advisor, who most resembled Maria Theresa's views and temperament was the Dutch Gerard Van Swieten, the monarch's physician, librarian and advisor on educational matters and on censorship. He was "moderate yet affective, conservative yet intent on reform, loyal yet frank, pragmatic and practical yet sensitive to tradition."⁴⁵ Some of these attributes may shed light on a certain lack of consistency in Maria Theresa's statecraft. Kaunitz was powerful, but there were limits to his influence, because, though she listened

42 I am grateful for this information to R.J.W. Evans.

43 Ernst Wangermann, "Matte Morgenrote Verzug und Widerruf im späten Reformwerk Maria Theresias" in Walter Koschatzky (ed.), *Maria Theresia und Ihre Zeit* (Salzburg, 1979), 69; R. William Weisberger, "Prague and Viennese freemasonry, the Enlightenment and the operations of the True Harmony Lodge of Vienna" in R. William Weisberger, Wallace McLeod, and S. Brent Morris (eds.), *Freemasonry on Both Sides of the Atlantic* (New York, 2002), 375–85.

44 Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism 1753–1780*, 31, 35, 354.

45 Frank T. Brechka, *Gerard Van Swieten and His World, 1700–1772* (The Hague, 1970), 4.

to a broad spectrum of advisers, Maria Theresa, at the end, made up her own mind. She was generally well-inclined to reforms but there were times when she was swayed by her own preferences or prejudices. Although open persecution of Jews and Protestants ceased, discrimination against them did not. She also entrusted the reform of elementary education to the Abbot of Sagan in Silesia, Johann Ignaz von Felbiger, who believed that "religion had primacy over reason." Although his commitment to education was unquestionable, the traditional curriculum he had promoted was only minimally changed. By the end of Maria Theresa's reign, enlightened advisors were embittered by her frequently recoiling from positions that they were holding.⁴⁶

Lack of consistency at the top may have also contributed to a sense of uncertainty below. To be a freemason in Austria was generally safe, but in March, 1743, soldiers broke into a meeting, arrested several members who were then charged with treason. Eventually, they were released and pardoned, illustrating the validity of the following statement: "The means at the disposal of the state to realize even well-intentioned measures were the police and censorship."⁴⁷ This statement by a well-known Austrian historian refers to the bureaucratic state Austria had become during Maria Theresa's reign and remained after, but surely, her contradictions must have added to the unpredictability built into the two institutions of the police and censorship. One reason why Joseph II's sole reign was welcomed by so many enlightened individuals initially was precisely that monarch's single-minded consistency.

It was Joseph II's personal tragedy that he was unable to sustain that initial commitment and enthusiasm, and in time, he alienated even Kaunitz and von Zinzendorf, who were closer to him in their beliefs than they were to his mother. But much as she frustrated them on occasion, she was a warm human being unlike her rigid and fanatical son. Furthermore, Kaunitz was a gradualist who believed in a step-by-step approach toward the realization of his ideas as opposed to Joseph II's

46 Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism 1753–1780*, 348; Winfried Romberg, *Johann Ignaz von Felbiger und Kardinal Johann Heinrich von Frankenberg. Wege der Religiösen Reform im 18. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen, 1999), 66; Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement 1700–1800*, 84–5; Wangermann, "Matte Morgenrote Verzug und Widerruf im späten Reformwerk Maria Theresias," 71.

47 Weisberger et al., *Freemasonry on Both Sides of the Atlantic*, 381; Heindl, *Gehorsame Rebellen*, 65.

wish to superimpose them fast.⁴⁸ Very few other monarchs have had such an extensive treatment by historians than Joseph II, who combined advancing bold policies with the eccentricities of a fascinating personality. He was influenced by many sources, primarily by the teachings of Pufendorf, Wolff, and Muratori. He rejected Voltaire and was neither a deist, let alone an atheist and remained a faithful Catholic.⁴⁹ What made him stand out then were not his ideas per se but his methods which were radical. In this regard and discounting the difference between their respective ideas, he was temperamentally closer to the radicals among the enlightened than to his own moderate advisors. Unlike the moderates, whose aim was to adapt or adjust their ideas and policies to the traditional societies they belonged to, the radicals wished to impose their vision on the very same. To a degree of course all monarchs tried to do that, but with the exception of Joseph II they all did so in a politic and realistic manner. When Joseph II was rebuffed it was because of his “rigorous methods,” that were often arbitrary and despotic.⁵⁰ Joseph II’s drastic methods became more pronounced in the second half of his reign, from 1785 on, causing growing frictions even with his closest advisors. His younger brother, Leopold, crowned emperor and king in 1790, was a committed disciple of the Enlightenment, but during the brief two years of his reign, he became the master of flexibility and adaptability to established political practices and traditions in order to safeguard the interests of his dynasty.⁵¹

It would nevertheless be a case of oversimplification to characterize the Enlightenment in Austria solely through its monarchs, important

48 Erich Zöllner, “Bemerkungen zum Problem der Beziehungen zwischen Aufklärung und Josephinismus” in *Österreich und Europa. Festgabe für Hugo Hantsch zum 70. Geburtstag* (Graz, 1965), 215; Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism*, 354.

49 Charles O’Brien, “Ideas of religious toleration at the time of Joseph II” (Unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1967), 23, 24; Erich Zöllner, “Bemerkungen zum Problem der Beziehungen zwischen Aufklärung und Josephinismus” in Helmut Reinalter (ed.), *Der Josephinismus: Bedeutung, Einflüsse und Wirkungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 31, 33.

50 Helmut Reinalter, “Aufgeklärter Absolutismus und Josephinismus” in Reinalter (ed.), *Der Josephinismus*, 18. According to Blanning, condemnation of Joseph II’s methods was not as universal as it was generally thought. Blanning, *Joseph II*, 199.

51 Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815* (Cambridge, 1994), 209.

as they were. The dividing line between societies with a heavy enlightenment-input and societies that were meagerly endowed in this regard could be roughly drawn between the Atlantic countries and Central/Eastern Europe. However, within each category variations proliferated. Southern Italy or the Vendee in France could rival any poor province in Central Europe, and conversely, Bohemia became quite prosperous. What at times mattered more than geography were local cultural determinants, closely tied to their social and economic moorings but often enjoying an independent existence of their own.

For instance, Austria had become the center of a dynasty, the Habsburgs, already in the late Middle Ages, a dynasty destined to lead the Holy Roman Empire for centuries. Not surprisingly, Vienna grew into a court city where nearly everything revolved around the Habsburgs. That imparted a form of rigid traditionalism which was present even when individual rulers became innovators and it resulted in a lack of independent thinking, or at least it slowed down the evolution of such thought.⁵² The dominance of traditionalism resembled the situation in Hungary but that was only part of the entire picture.

Traditionalism co-existed with a dynamic economic development, guided by cameralist principles and practices, and that, along with the transformation of the Habsburg state into a bureaucratic one, ushered in both “productive reforms” and “structure-conserving” efforts, with results that to a present-day observer would appear incoherent. Franz Szabo wrote in a similar vein, describing a three-cornered dynamic struggle between traditionalism, cameralism, and the Enlightenment, creating a sense of “ambivalence.” Although the last two had a great deal in common they were not the same—cameralism was by definition more conservative—and, on occasion, conflicts arose between their adherents.⁵³

The ideas of the Enlightenment filtered into Austria and they produced an intellectual ferment, especially in the first half of the 1780s,

52 Robert A. Kann, *A Study in Austrian Intellectual History From Late Baroque to Romanticism* (New York, 1960), 135.

53 Karl Acham, “Nachwort. Sonnenfels und seine Zeit. Eine Vergegenwärtigung” in Hildegard Kremers (ed.), *Joseph von Sonnenfels Aufklärung als Sozialpolitik Ausgewählte Schriften aus den Jahren 1764–1798* (Vienna, 1994), 227; Franz A.J. Szabo, “Ambivalenzen der Aufklärungspolitik in der Habsburger-Monarchie unter Joseph II und Leopold II” in Gerhard Ammerer and Hanns Haas (eds.), *Ambivalenzen der Aufklärung. Festschrift für Ernst Wangermann* (Wien, 1997), 21–32, 23.

when censorship was at its most lenient, and when even writings critical of Joseph II were allowed to be published. By the second half of the 1780s, Joseph became concerned about threats, presumably endangering the stability of his empire, and he clamped down on freedom of expression. In reality, Habsburg rule was under no danger, not in Austria. The masses were still religious as baroque forms of worship survived in an atmosphere described as “*Pietas Austriaca*,” emanating from the dynasty, and the conduct of the state was firmly in the hands of the bureaucracy. The bureaucrats, whatever their inner feelings or beliefs, were statists above all, who always followed the lead laid down by their sovereign. All that assured survival but not necessarily fortunate circumstances. R.J.W. Evans summarized the peculiarities of Austria in the late eighteenth century. According to him, the transformation from a “court-based to a state-based culture,” was incomplete because of the continuing dynastic and aristocratic patronage and “the absence of middle-class consciousness,” characteristics that retarded creativity and led to “intellectual provincialism.”⁵⁴ It was this Austria which attempted to modernize not only Austria but Hungary as well. The reason for the partial failure of this attempt had to do with powerful traditionalist resistance in the first instance, but also perhaps with the inner contradictions inside Austria itself.

To analyze enlightened absolutism and reform-Catholicism is beyond the scope of this book, but briefly, enlightened absolutism may be conceived not statically but along a spectrum of possibilities, fluctuating between the requirements of secular state power and the partial realization of enlightened ideas. The statement, “The Enlightenment always took second place to power when there was a conflict”⁵⁵ seems to ring true, but frequently, the rulers’ aim was to harmonize the two. They never shortchanged the interests of their states, but their well-chosen enlightened policies may have alleviated, on occasion, the adverse impacts of seemingly intractable social or cultural problems. Joseph II’s reign proves that point. In Maria Theresa’s case, reform-Catholicism played a significant role. Certainly, many Catholic and Protestant clergymen came to believe in the compatibility of reason and faith, resulting in a somewhat denatured religiosity, “subdued

54 R.J.W. Evans, “Culture and authority in Central Europe, 1683–1806” in Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 73–4.

55 Isser Woloch, *Eighteenth Century Europe: Tradition and Progress, 1715–1789* (New York, 1982), 250.

piety,” in Louis Dupré’s formulation. Such religiosity was an ally of the Enlightenment in its fight against baroque Catholicism but it is also possible to regard it as an actual or potential adversary, because it was impossible to ignore revelation in Christianity, a concept contrary to the core beliefs of the Enlightenment.⁵⁶

HUNGARY

The very same forces that worked in Austria, slowing down the spread of new ideas and practices, were at work in Hungary just as much if not more. Baroque attitudes, closely connected to deep religious feelings, contributed to such a slowdown. What retarded this progress even more was the presence and strength of the powerful estate of the nobility in control of the counties and the diets. While not homogeneous and liable to certain changes, this nobility as a corporate entity remained traditional and conservative in all of its essential aspects.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as there were changes in Hungary they had three major sources: one emanated from Vienna in an effort to modernize and integrate Hungary with the rest of the Habsburg Monarchy; the other was a shift in cultural sensibilities, accompanied by a growth in religious tolerance, and finally, there were certain changes that had taken place within the ranks of the nobility itself. All these trends had engendered counter-trends: reform activities initiated by the Habsburgs were sabotaged in the counties and displays of religious intolerance were probably more frequent than those of tolerance, and finally, the nobility did everything in its power to retain its privileges and its leading role in society along with any changes that were occurring.

All three trends had antecedents during the first half of the eighteenth century. Vienna streamlined the administration to a degree already in the 1720s, proven by the establishment of the Vice-Regal Council and the reorganization of the judicial system. The bulk of the noble delegates at successive diets, passive and lacking any interest in

56 Bernard Plongeron, “Was ist Katholische Aufklärung?” in Elisabeth Kovacs (ed.), *Katholische Aufklärung und Josephinismus* (München, 1979), 12, 55; Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, 2004), 318; T.C.W. Blanning, “The Enlightenment in Catholic Germany” in Porter and Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context*, 119–20.

reforms, was not an active partner to that save for a handful of delegates. One of them, Count Sándor Károlyi, tried to match reforms initiated by the court with some of his own, already in the 1720s, including support for commerce and industry, but he confronted both active and passive resistance by most of his fellow delegates. "They [the delegates]," wrote Károlyi, "eat and drink and by the afternoons barely any of them is around"; they receive any reforms uncomprehendingly, because "their grandfather never even dreamed of such [reforms]."⁵⁷ As the proceedings of subsequent diets during the 1740s, 50s, and 60s, most notoriously in 1764–65, demonstrate, the vast majority of the delegates' attitudes remained essentially unchanged.

The diets of the early eighteenth century were dominated by sharp arguments between Catholics and Protestants, but by the time the diet of 1728–29 came to an end, the Catholic extremist Count József Esterházy became totally discredited among the Protestant delegates in spite of his strong support of noble privileges. Following that diet religious issues were losing their predominance and that in turn advanced the process of integration among the nobility, although this process was painfully slow as discrimination against Protestants continued.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, growing personal interactions between Catholics and Protestants paved the way towards some degree of integration. To the historian Henrik Marczali that was a natural outcome; after all, they were all the "sons of the same country." He then proceeded to list examples: Catholics and Protestants alike were members of the diets and conversations between them could become easy once they crossed certain mental barriers. Even the Jesuit historian, István Katona appreciated the fact that Protestants too were reading his books, and when the Catholic aristocrat, Count Károly Pálffy was installed as Lord Lieutenant of Zemplén County, the faculty and students of the Calvinist College of Sárospatak were there to greet him. "Denominational discord," concluded Marczali, "which could have resulted in fatal consequences at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Hungary, was, by 1780 not dangerous any longer but merely a matter of nuisance." Indeed, the fervent Catholic traditionalist, Count

57 Quoted in Ágnes Kovács, *Károlyi Sándor* (Budapest, 1988), 144, 145, 146, 147, 151, 156.

58 *Diéta*, 278, 277; Elemér Mályusz, *Iratok a türelmi rendelet történetéhez* [Documents relating to the history of the Toleration Patent] (Budapest, 1940), 4–23.

József Gvadányi, carried on a friendly correspondence with the Protestant pastor, József Péczeli. In one letter Gvadányi reminisced about the times when as an officer of the army he stationed in Szatmár County, where he made the acquaintance of Sámuel Szilágyi, the superintendent of the Calvinist College at Debrecen whom he found intelligent and well-informed.⁵⁹

One could of course find many examples of fanaticism and intolerance; continuing mutual suspicion between Catholics and Protestants formed a kind of subterranean volcanic lava that occasionally erupted to the surface, most notably at the 1790–91 diet. Nevertheless, not even then did the religious issue occupy the center stage again.⁶⁰ Reflecting the general tenor of the second half of the century, spoken and written fanaticism was often worse than in actuality. “Only under the reign of Maria Theresa,” wrote Sándor Báróczi, “did we start to relax,” and “the greater mildness of morals carries the promise of a somewhat jollier future.”⁶¹

It was no coincidence that Báróczi brought up the question of morals, because the gradual transformation of religious sensibilities ushered in a growing preoccupation with morality and happiness in Hungary too, without eliminating Catholic baroque piety and Calvinist orthodoxy at the same time. In the period between 1750 and 1780, meditations on morality dominated Hungarian publications, which was a clear indication of public interest.⁶² In a book, published in 1754, the Jesuit Pál Bertalanffi, connected “Christian wisdom” to “Christian piety,” and emphasized “good morality” that even evil people would appreciate in others. Such morality should encompass being religious, adhering to the laws of the country and maintaining old customs. Changing any of the above would be “dangerous.” In another book by József Ferentz Kollmann, published in 1777 and directed to young readers, the author claimed that “only good morality makes one a true noble,” and “fearing God is not the sole aim of existence but so is

59 Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century*, 297–300; Gvadányi József levelei Péczeli Józsefhez [The letters of József Gvadányi to József Péczeli], 1788–1791, MTAK Kt., *Magyar irodalmi levelezések* [Hungarian literary correspondence], 4-r, no. 148.

60 *Diéta*, 277–80.

61 Báróczi, *A védelmezett magyar nyelv*, 11, 12, 27–8.

62 Ferenc Bíró, *A fiatal Bessenyei és íróbarátai* [The young Bessenyei and his writer friends] (Budapest, 1976), 5.

clever success in life.” Pál Szlávy entitled his book, published in 1779, *The Way to Wisdom*. To reach that aim “good morality is the most important.” All else is subordinated to that requirement, and he too claimed that “genuine nobility stems from good morality.”⁶³ Báróczi himself translated a book on morality from German and published it in 1775. The introduction is his, and in it he discussed genuine love, which should promote “the common good.” Love, in his interpretation, needed both reciprocity and “beautiful morals.”⁶⁴ Striving after good morality grew into something to be universally desired. Many of the recipients of that message were nobles, and their widely-shared objective proved to be another integrating force among them, even if it was realized only partially or imperfectly or perhaps not at all.

In addition to changes in cultural sensibilities, a gradual and partial development in social behavior was also taking place in Hungary during the second half of the eighteenth century. The relatively better-off nobles could not live hermetically closed off from the rest of the world. Gradually, a new and refined cuisine and the consumption of coffee, tea and chocolate were spreading, utensils were increasingly used, and the old custom of getting drunk at meals was beginning to be frowned upon. Foreign dresses and dances, such as the minuet, were adopted, and in general, politeness and civility came to be appreciated.⁶⁵

Was there any connection between the adoption of new behavioral patterns and the acceptance of new enlightened ideas? There is no categorical answer to that question, because answers could range from a repudiation of such ideas through a thoroughly internalized acceptance of them and anything-in-between. In order to evaluate a group’s characteristic beliefs and ways of thinking, other aspects of their lives must be considered. That is significant, because Norbert Elias took an essentially holistic approach, writing about “human interdependence in conjunction with the structure of conduct” that eventually resulted

63 Pál Bertalanffi, *Keresztény bölcsesség avagy az okos és istenes keresztény életbe mindenféle üdvösséges oktatások* [Christian wisdom and clever and godly teachings] (Nagyszombat, 1754), 9, 82, 270–4; József Ferentz Kollmann, *Jeles gondolatok rövid történetekkel* [Eminent thoughts with brief stories] (Kolozsvár, 1777), 1, 93; Pál Szlávy, *Bölcsességhez vezető út* [The way to wisdom] (Pest, 1779), 5, 13.

64 Sándor Báróczi, *Erkölcsei levelek* [Moral letters] (Vienna, 1775), 2, 3.

65 Vörös, “A társadalom az életmód tükrében,” 759–60.

in a “cohesive picture of history and the human universe.”⁶⁶ In the real world of the eighteenth century, it was not always possible to gain a “cohesive picture of history.” For example, the nobles in Hungary adopted only the external trappings of the new “civilized” behavioral patterns without in any way abandoning their traditional ways of thinking. That was by no means an exceptional case. In the eighteenth century, “the European Russian had a split identity... on one level he was conscious of acting out his life according to prescribed European conventions; yet on another plane his inner life was swayed by Russian customs and sensibilities.” Also in Russia, the German nobles in the Baltic were proud of their medieval roots and their autonomous institutions and traditions, yet they excelled in their “education and urbanity as compared to their compatriots in Germany.”⁶⁷

For Hungary, it would be impossible to conceive that enlightened ideas from abroad would have overturned, in a matter of a few decades, the nobles’ deeply entrenched sense of permanence, their defensive egotism and self-satisfied attachment to traditions. It was much easier to adopt new customs. To a degree, the spread of the new cultural sensibilities ameliorated religious animosities and altered rude behavior, but, on the whole, that did not necessarily extend to an acceptance of reforms.

Similarly to the situation in Spain, Poland, and Russia, certain individuals and small circles of like-minded friends did become promoters of the Enlightenment in Hungary as well, but they constituted isolated small islands in the sea of deeply entrenched traditionalism. The rhetoric some of them used, however, was at times no different from the self-confident or even militant voices emanating from France. In this sense then, the Enlightenment was indeed a broadly based movement, cutting across national frontiers; more than just a fad, it projected an optimistic faith in the universal struggle against darkness by the triumphant forces of light. Ferenc Kazinczy was an enlightened writer and a fervent freemason. This is what he wrote to György Aranka on March 25, 1790, “I am determined to tear the bloody dagger out of the hands of Superstitio and scrape off its dreadful mask.

66 Elias, *The Civilizing Process State Formation and Civilization*, 1: 228, 319.

67 Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York, 2002), 44; Heide W. Whelan, *Adapting Modernity Family, Caste and Capitalism among the Baltic German Nobility* (Köln, 1999), 18, 56.

Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvetius... they are placing a shield into my left and a sword into my right hand.”⁶⁸

Words do have consequences but they operate differently in different environments. In France, for instance, only those practical proposals were brought to pass that were promoted primarily by the new cultural sensibilities and then reinforced by the Enlightenment: religious tolerance and the abolishment of torture. Still, the emergence of an ever-widening politicized Enlightenment culture and politicized public opinion resulted in a process of democratization aiming, however remotely, at an egalitarian society. Regardless of the speed and intensity of this process, the public support for the subsequent French Revolution would have been inconceivable had not those antecedents, the process of democratization prepared the way. Without that, “the Revolution” could not have “mobilized society and disarmed the State.”⁶⁹

In contrast, in Hungary, such a broadening of political discourse was not possible, and especially the militant phrases were no more than purely rhetorical ones. Naturally, pure rhetoric too could have had an impact even if it affected only a relatively small number of people, and providing a precedent for the future was another likely outcome. Nevertheless, what one cannot or rather should not do is to take this rhetoric at its face value as a reflection of an underlying broad social-political context, as if the shield and the sword Kazinczy was clamoring for could have really been wielded with massive effectiveness. They could not have been. The few enlightened men in Hungary were an embattled minority who tried hard to fit in, adjusting to their traditional environment as much as they could. Their small numbers kept any democratic impulse to a negligible minimum, and they themselves were torn between the old and the new, retaining enough of the former not to stand totally apart from the vast majority of the traditionalists.

Still, the liberating passion of the past did affect some of the older and certainly modern Hungarian historiography. There is a near-consensus in the latter about treating the Enlightenment in Hungary as a

68 Ferenc Kazinczy to György Aranka, March 25, 1790, János Váczy (ed.), *Kazinczy Ferenc levelézése* [The correspondence of Ferenc Kazinczy], 21 volumes (Budapest, 1891), 2: 51; hereafter cited as *Kazinczy*.

69 François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1991; originally published in French in 1978), 24.

glorious chapter in the nation's history, as one that extricated the country from its retrograde reactionary moorings and launched its phase of progressive liberalism, culminating in the "Age of Reform" and in the 1848 Revolution. This essentially presentist view treats any apparent anomaly, doubt, nuance or ambiguity as anathema. It is important to stress that not the intrinsic merits of the Enlightenment are questioned here but its concrete place and relative importance in the evolution of Hungary's history.

Győző Concha, writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, shared many of his fellow Hungarians' distaste for what they then perceived as the lethargy of eighteenth century Hungary. "The nation," wrote Concha, "was dreaming the eternity of feudal privileges throughout most of the century." He credited the Habsburg rulers and western influences with awakening the spirit of the Enlightenment in a "not insignificant part of the nation"; that is its impact transcended the elite and reached the common men, the nation. Concha looked upon the era of the Enlightenment in Hungary as "the most productive in the country's history." Elemér Mályusz and Gyula Szekfű were more skeptical. According to Mályusz, the fact that Hungary was less advanced meant that enlightened ideas "had no resonance," and thus they met with indifference or incomprehension. Szekfű used the metaphor of a warm underground spring that tried to burst unto the surface but could not because of the "heavy armor of the old culture." What it could do however was to flow into subterranean lakes, to wait patiently until an earthquake or some other force threw its content to the surface.⁷⁰

Nearly all skepticism disappeared from the works of Hungarian historians in the second half of the twentieth century. The sole concession was an acknowledgement about the small number of the enlightened, but even that was usually couched in such a way as to negate the historical importance of size. "[The enlightened group]," wrote István Fried, "was a relatively narrow circle, but in its contacts, energy, and capacity to exploit opportunities it was a significant

70 Győző Concha, *A kilencvenes évek reformeszméi és előzményeik* [The reforming ideas and their antecedents in the 90s] (Budapest, 1885), 10, 11–38, 61; Elemér Mályusz, *Magyarország története a felvilágosodás korában* [Hungary's history during the era of the Enlightenment] (Budapest, 2002), 94; Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet* [Hungarian history], 8 volumes (Budapest, 1936), 5: 11.

one.”⁷¹ Certainly, it was a significant group, but the statement failed to place those who were enlightened into their proper historical context and failed to ask the question who else might have occupied the social-political space much more effectively and extensively. Undoubtedly the traditionalists did.

Rather than stringing together quote upon quote by various authors, all praising the Enlightenment in Hungary, a more interesting question would inquire what was the reason behind their near-unanimous praise? Perhaps, after two lost wars, lost revolutions, Trianon, fascism, and Stalinism, historians and their public joined together in compensating, understandably even if somewhat inappropriately, for all the above calamities by appreciating and glorifying a liberal and humane past.⁷²

Admittedly, what complicates the picture again is rhetoric. At this point not the militant variety but enlightened rhetoric that was used by the better educated segment of the nobility to buttress its claims to national leadership and the preservation of its privileges. Already Henrik Marczali noticed in the late nineteenth century that intransigently as this nobility was entrenched in the defense of “the old,” it could not fully evade the impact of “the new.” The less so because what was new was simultaneously fashionable, and fashion, in Marczali’s opinion, was a powerful agent of change.⁷³ This nobility was not plagued by self-doubts about its legitimacy as great many French noblemen were, and therefore, applying enlightened ideas to strengthen its own position was done with consummate ease and self-confidence.

Montesquieu, in his famous work, *L’ésprit des lois*, published in 1748, condemned the concentration of power and tyranny on empirical grounds. His middle-of-the-road approach as well as his “moderate, pluralist temper” made it possible that reactionary noblemen could seize upon his ideas as much as progressive reformers.⁷⁴ After

71 István Fried, “II. József, a jozefinisták és a reformerek” [Joseph II, the Josephinists and the reformers], *Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Évkönyve* (1979), 567.

72 “Apart from compensation, another consideration was to prove that there was an Enlightenment in Hungary, in contrast to none among the Romanians and the Serbs, and one that stood its ground against the Habsburgs.” Letter of May 20, 2008 of András Gergely to the author.

73 Marczali, *Az 1790–91. országgyűlés*, 1: 277, 290.

74 Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times from the Enlightenment to the Present* 5 (New York, 1995; originally published in 1960), 30.

all, tyranny was in the eye of the beholder. His attraction to the nobility in Hungary was enhanced by the fact that to Montesquieu the monarchy was an indispensable institution while the nobility was perceived as the keeper of ethical standards, especially that of *honneur*, "honor." As was mentioned earlier, Montesquieu visited the diet in Pozsony in 1728 and was favorably impressed, an impression that was reinforced by the events of 1741 in the same city. That diets and royal power faced each other was a confirmation in his eyes of the division of powers that he had advocated. On their part, the Hungarian nobility was more than pleased to see itself as fighting Habsburg tyranny, and they were also keen to draw the conclusion from Montesquieu's division of powers "that both the monarch and the nobility possessed indefeasible prerogatives, that the two powers were interconnected and yet existed independently side by side."⁷⁵ Montesquieu's idealization of this nobility blinded him to the fact that in their own sphere these noblemen were capable of exercising tyranny over their serfs.

Voltaire's popularity in certain educated circles, his works in the libraries of aristocrats with a Francophile education, such as Count István Csáky, his wife, Countess Júlia Erdődy, and Count Mihály Sztárai, prove the presence of "voltaireism" as an intellectual fashion.⁷⁶ However, the real impulse for religious pluralism and anti-clericalism stemmed primarily not from the spread of enlightened ideas but from the growing spread of the new cultural sensibilities. The reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants stemmed from that and was taking place unevenly but without being stopped or reversed. Individual

75 Péter, "Montesquieu's paradox on freedom and Hungary's constitutions 1790–1990," 80; see also Mihály Horváth, "Az országtani teóriák eredete, kifejlése s gyakorlati befolyása az újabb Európában" [The origin, development and practical impact of nation-wide theories in the new Europe] in Lajos Pál (ed.), *Horváth Mihály. Polgárosodás, liberalizmus, függetlenségi harc. Válogatott írások* [Mihály Horváth. Embourgeoisement, liberalism, struggle for independence: Selected writings] (Budapest, 1986), 91–4; Béla Köpeczi, "Montesquieu és a magyar feudalizmus" [Montesquieu and Hungarian feudalism] in Béla Köpeczi (ed.), *Magyarok és franciák XIV. Lajostól a francia forradalomig* [Hungarians and the French from Louis XIV to the French Revolution] (Budapest, 1985), 324–5.

76 Olga Granasztói, "A franciás műveltségű magyar arisztokrácia három különleges figurájának portréja könyvgyűjtő tevékenységük tükrében" [The portraits of three Francophile Hungarian aristocrats in light of their activity as book collectors], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 116, no. 1 (2000), 10, 15.

Catholic churchmen were attacked not for their beliefs but for the baroque baggage they were still carrying. Similarly, their Protestant counterparts were assailed for their rigid orthodoxy rather than for their faith.

What did exist instead was a kind of “Voltaire-cult,” that an anonymous traditionalist mocked in a poem, published by the *Bécsi Magyar Múzsza* in 1788. According to him, some people “fondled their Voltaire” as if he were their daughter. If there was a “high priest” of that cult, it was Count János Fekete, a retired army general and a passionate enthusiast for Voltaire. He corresponded with him and sent him his bad French poems along with good Hungarian wine. Fekete railed at the Catholic Church, but, at the same time, he defended the “ancient constitution” and noble privileges against Joseph II, which prompted his biographer to label him a “reactionary.” Another source, however, named him as one of those aristocrats, who, in the late 1780s, wished to incorporate the peasantry into the country’s political life. József Péczeli was an ordained Calvinist minister, yet he translated several plays by Voltaire. The ultraconservative Catholic Gvadányi found the translation of *La Henriade* “beautifully done” and he struck up a friendship with Péczeli.⁷⁷ His commitment to the ideas of the Enlightenment notwithstanding, Péczeli was also devoted to his religious faith as were enlightened Catholics to theirs, such as the piarist Károly Köppi, professor of history in Pest from 1784 on, and Count Ferenc Széchenyi. None of them would have had any use for Voltaire’s deism.

If Voltaire was primarily a name to be dropped in polite company, Rousseau’s *Contrat Social* offered a welcome weapon in the arsenal of the nobility. At the time of the 1790–91 diet, a Lutheran nobleman from Nógrád County and a member of the Court of Seven, Judge Péter Balogh Ócsai was the leader of the lesser nobility. He began to circulate a constitutional draft among the counties, which borrowed heavily

77 Quoted in Sándor Eckhardt, *A francia forradalom eszméi Magyarországon* [The ideas of the French Revolution in Hungary] (Budapest, 1924), 63; Győző Morvay, *Galánthai Gróf Fekete János* (Budapest, 1903), 84, 87, 126; Kálmán Benda, “A magyar nemesi mozgalom (1790–1792)” [The movement of the Hungarian nobility (1790–1792)] in Gyula Mérei and Károly Vörös (eds.), *Magyarország Története 1790–1848*, 2 volumes (Budapest, 1980–1983), 1: 46; hereafter cited as *MT*; Ferenc Biró, “Péczeli József,” *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 69, nos. 4–5 (1965), 408.

from the *Contrat Social*. In Balogh's opinion, Joseph II broke the contract with the Hungarian nation by his tyrannical measures. In a new contract to be negotiated, the diet would share governing with the monarch. The lesser nobility was to be dominant in it. In Balogh's interpretation, they, this nobility represented the people, the "*populus*."⁷⁸

Balogh elaborated on this draft to Sándor Pászthory, an official in the Hungarian Chancery. At one point he used the phraseology of the Enlightenment by writing, "...I am lighting a candle to those walking in the dark," and, in another part he virtually eliminated the aristocracy as a political factor by saying, "I attribute all propositions to the king and to the Lower Chamber, which... represents the people."⁷⁹ Although Ambrus Miskolczy admits that Balogh was a "complex man," he was not, according to Miskolczy, "the vehicle of werbőczyian backwardness but a modern... machiavellian politician." Usually, for most people in that period being one kind or another was not an either-or proposition as they could be and were often both. In Christof Dipper's succinct formulation, "Reality prefers mongrels."⁸⁰ Especially the reality of a century, the eighteenth, that was simultaneously transformative and transitional. In societies that were strongly traditionalist, such as in Hungary, educated people grew up with certain definite expectations and aspirations that were naturally traditionalist in character. If certain ideas of the Enlightenment encroached on that, the results became exercises in accommodations rather than attempts at replacing a deeply entrenched set of values by new ones.

Ábrahám Barcsay was a nobleman from Transylvania, a member of Maria Theresa's Hungarian noble bodyguard. In a poem he composed in 1777, Barcsay expressed a desire for both change and tranquility. "The world," he claimed, "could not stand still and nations' happiness was linked to their ability to change." At the same time, he endorsed society's hierarchical structure—"whoever is placed by fate

78 MT 1: 49–50; Kosáry, 182.

79 Péter Balogh Ócsai's letter of November 15, 1792, to Sándor Pászthory. Hungarian National Archives, P 643 Szőgyény-Marich family, no. 311.

80 Ambrus Miskolczy, *A modern magyar demokratikus kultúra "eredeti jellegzeteségeiről," 1790–1849* [On the "original attributes" of modern Hungarian democratic culture 1790–1849] (Budapest, 2006), 18–9; Dipper, "Orders and classes: Eighteenth century society under pressure," 88.

should stay there”—and he also admonished his readers not to criticize his nation’s faults but cherish what had been accomplished already, “allow the morality of villages to spread to the towns,” and wait patiently for the amelioration of remaining problems with a “quiet heart.”⁸¹

Although Baron Lőrinc Orczy, another retired general, was well-acquainted with the latest intellectual trends in the West, he was even more attached to what was traditional, to the point of rejecting foreign technology and fashion, and asking rhetorically in one of his poems whether “deceitful commerce suited Hungarians?” His categorical answer was no, because such activity would lead to moral decline. He concluded that in several counties he had listed, people had plenty of money, food, and wine, so why live life in “uncertainty just to make more money?”⁸²

János Batsányi came from a burgher family, but he identified with the nobility as a young man. Still, in 1789, he greeted the outbreak of the French Revolution enthusiastically. A year later, Batsányi jubilantly celebrated the nobility’s victory over Joseph II, extolling their heroism and reintroducing, in his opinion, “the full force of liberty, law and language.” In his 1790 letter to Count Miklós Forgách, he emphasized the significance of preserving both the national language and national literature, and, in a traditionalist twist, he warned that abandoning them would be tantamount to allowing all national virtues and customs to disappear. In a poem, composed in 1791 and appropriately entitled the “visionary,” he exhorted “the woeful mind to cheer up” because “the world was renewing,” and ushering in the rule of “reason, merit, justice, law, equality, and blessed liberty.”⁸³

Count Alajos Batthány went far in attacking his own class, the aristocrats and the clergy and in advocating sweeping reforms, including

81 László Vajthó (ed.), *Barcsay Ábrahám költeményei* [The poems of Ábrahám Barcsay] (Budapest, 1933), 120–1.

82 Márta Mezei (ed.), *Magyar költők, 18. század* [Hungarian poets, the 18th century] (Budapest, 1983), 134.

83 László Lator (ed.), *A magyar klasszicizmus. Válogatás* [Hungarian classicism: Selections] (Budapest, 1996), 56; Dezső Keresztury and Andor Tarnai (eds.), *Batsányi János összes művei. Prózai művek* [The collected works of János Batsányi: His works in prose], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1960), 1: 201; Eszter Sík (ed.), *Felvilágosodás és romantika a magyar irodalomban* [Enlightenment and romanticism in Hungarian literature] (Budapest, 1993), 66–7.

compelling the nobility to share in the burden of taxation and enabling the serfs of acquiring property and offices. He nevertheless stopped short of proposing their emancipation as he wished to keep the power in the hands of the lower nobility.⁸⁴

Count József Teleki, a most erudite and cultured aristocrat, travelled in the West and knew Voltaire, Rousseau, and D'Alembert personally, but his approach to Voltaire in particular was hostile. His short book, *Essai sur la foiblesse des Esprits-forts* was published in 1760 and received quite a notoriety. Promoters of the Enlightenment disdained it—György Aranka called the author “a dwarf fighting giants”—but others, such as Maria Theresa, liked the book. Teleki condemned the lack of faith in religion and praised the superiority of Christian teachings. Nevertheless, in his biographer's opinion, Teleki was not altogether a rabid opponent of the Enlightenment because he supported religious tolerance, the cultivation of national language and culture and other moderate reforms.⁸⁵

Prominent as all these people were in their respective spheres of influence, their significance was relatively minor compared to the towering figure of the Enlightenment in Hungary, György Bessenyei. Without any preparation he was thrown from his world of Protestant Eastern Hungary, that a literary historian characterized as a world of “sleepy indolence” and “boastful ignorance” to Vienna as member of Maria Theresa's royal bodyguard. There, he realized the vast differences between his “own past and the Francophile cultural center” that Vienna had become and he came to perceive Hungary's obligation to narrow this “gaping precipice.”⁸⁶ Bessenyei was realistic enough to know that the vast majority of his countrymen would not be up for that task, but he assumed a leading role in disseminating new ideas and plans that would do just that. He explicitly defined patriotism as a duty, and he also stated that whoever was not doing his duty did not deserve to be called a human being. He believed that attachment to

84 MT 1: 44; Benda, *Emberbarát vagy hazafi*, 353.

85 Dóra Csanák F., *Két korszak határán. Teleki József, a hagyományörző és felvilágosult gondolkodó* [At the borderline of two eras: József Teleki, the traditionalist and enlightened thinker] (Budapest, 1983), 126–33, 473–6.

86 Sándor Lukácsy, *A végtelen jövő. Irodalmi tanulmányok* [The endless future: Literary studies] (Budapest, 1998), 89; János Hankiss, *Európa és a magyar irodalom* [Europe and Hungarian literature] (Budapest, 1939) 151.

what was old amounted to conceding to ignorance.⁸⁷ In Vienna he became acquainted with the works of French, German and English thinkers that launched him on the double career of a thinker and a reformer. What is intriguing from the point-of-view of this book is not how far he progressed in digesting the writings of a Voltaire or a D'Holbach, but how he managed to handle his own apparent contradictions, which, that needs to be stressed, did not appear as contradictions to Bessenyei himself.

Although he was by no means uncritical of his nation's past, he extolled the noble ancestors who "bled in the defense of their country," and castigated those lacking faith in that past as "spitting on their fathers' graves." The laws of the country should be maintained because they were "sacred." Yes, reforms were necessary, but only to the point of mitigating the oppression of one group by another. He clearly referred to the oppression of the peasantry by the nobles. He condemned contempt, scorn, and unnecessary cruelty against the peasants, but warned that they should be kept under strict discipline, because, "should they rise... there will not be a cruel beast that would inflict worse damage than they would." In another book though he claimed that all differences between people come from God, regardless which class they were born into, and human cruelty and ignorance should in time be eliminated by "knowledge and gentle virtues"; even the nobility was to be redefined in those terms.⁸⁸

A similar duality characterized the freemasons; nobles and non-nobles alike, often living isolated lives in intellectually grim environments, were thirsting for companionship and the pleasure of mingling in masonic lodges with like-minded people. Even if some of the talk in those lodges was trivial, not all of it was such, and Domokos Kosáry

87 Ferenc Bíró (ed.), *Bessenyei György válogatott művei* [The selected works of György Bessenyei] (Budapest, 1987), 341, 351; József Szauder (ed.), *Bessenyei György válogatott művei* [The selected works of György Bessenyei] (Budapest, 1953), 201.

88 Bíró, *Bessenyei György válogatott művei*, 341, 410; 337–8, 349; Péter Kulcsár (ed.), *Bessenyei György. Társadalombölcseleti írások, 1771–1778* (György Bessenyei: Social-philosophical writings, 1771–1778] (Budapest, 1992), 94; Ferenc Bíró, "Bessenyei György társasága" [The company of György Bessenyei] in Béla Köpeczi and László Sziklay (eds.), *A francia felvilágosodás és a magyar kultúra. Tanulmányok* [The French Enlightenment and Hungarian culture: Studies] (Budapest, 1975), 179.

was right in calling them, “opinion-forming forums.” Still, like in all other countries, Masonic lodges were microcosms of an educated segment in their respective societies, and therefore to state that “freemasonry is... the negation of feudalism,” is incorrect, as if feudalism were a jacket that could be taken off at will.⁸⁹ After all, freemasonry was not an abstract concept but a social reality, and feudal barriers and snobism were integral parts of the times. Although nobles rubbed shoulders with non-nobles in the lodges—and that should be perceived as a genuine advancement—in the most popular lodges, known by their founder, Count János Draskovich, as *Draskovich-obszervancia*, the nobility dominated. Members were divided between the “chosen” and the “participants,” with the primary role given to the first noble-led group.⁹⁰ It could not have been otherwise.

Another source of possible infusion of enlightened ideas came from students, returning from universities in the West. Most though not all of them were Protestants. Some indeed embarked on illustrious careers, such as György Maróthi and István Hatvani, professors in Debrecen, Mátyás Ráth, the pioneer of Hungarian journalism, Gergely Berzeviczy, Baron József Podmaniczky, and others. However, not all universities were progressive. If a student enrolled at Oxford, for instance, he could come back to Hungary as strongly traditionalist in his beliefs as when he left, because Oxford had that kind of orientation.⁹¹ Such a student was Miklós Sinai, who, upon his return to Hungary, had become a controversial Calvinist bishop in Debrecen.

The biggest problem derived from the extreme poverty of most students, whose experiences abroad were consequently limited. As were their prospects upon their return to Hungary. They often ended up in remote and backward villages as impoverished Calvinist pastors.

89 Domokos Kosáry, “Felvilágosult abszolutizmus – felvilágosult rendiség” [Enlightened absolutism and enlightened feudalism], *Történelmi Szemle* 19, no. 4 (1976), 707; Miskolczy, *A modern magyar demokratikus kultúra “eredeti jellegzetességeiről,”* 35.

90 Gábor Vermes, “Ideál és valóság. Szabadkőművesek Magyarországon a 18. században” [Ideal and reality: Freemasons in Hungary in the eighteenth century] in János Angi and János Barta (eds.), *Emlékkönyv L. Nagy Zsuzsa 70. születésnapjára* [Memorial volume honoring Zsuzsa L. Nagy on the occasion of her 70th birthday] (Debrecen, 2000), 98.

91 John Prest (ed.), *The Illustrated History of Oxford University* (Oxford, 1993), 56–7.

"I witnessed the return of many young men after studying at foreign universities," wrote József Kármán, "and saw them sink into an inextricable torpor after settling down... their brains became sluggish and their morality conformist."⁹²

For all these handicaps, an intense intellectual ferment took place in Hungary in the 1780s and early 1790s, when newspapers and literally hundreds of pamphlets were published, expressing views that ranged from the extreme clerical to the radical utopian. In 1789–90, newspapers such as the *Magyar Hirmondó* and the *Magyar Kurír* attracted between 400 and 500 and 1,200 subscribers respectively. Newspaper copies were often passed around, so that the actual number of readers exceeded the number of subscribers. The number of printed copies of pamphlets varied, and most likely it did not rise above the average number of books, which was in the low-to middle hundreds.⁹³

This intellectual ferment was real as was its intensity, but that ferment resembled turbulent waves on the surface while below the turbulence the deep sea remained relatively calm. Two memoirs, each written by members of the lower nobility, seem to support that point. József Keresztesi was one of the Calvinist students who studied in the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), and became, upon his return, a Calvinist pastor and a delegate to the 1790–91 diet. Most of his recollections centered around his denomination, including quarrels within his congregation and with Catholics, with affairs of the county he settled in, Bihar County, and with the struggle against Joseph II's unpopular edicts. Ignác Farádi Vörös was a Catholic nobleman who served Joseph II's regime in Temes County. Although he was a mason, there are no indications of intellectual interests in his diary, much of which was taken up with discussing his bureaucratic duties and with matters of his estate.⁹⁴ Yet, to Éva H. Balázs, "Hungarian political thinking was

92 Kármán, *A nemzet csinosodása*, 12–3.

93 Géza Ballagi, *A politikai irodalom Magyarországon 1825-ig* [The political literature in Hungary up to 1825] (Budapest, 1888); György Kóka (ed.), *A magyar sajtó története 1705–1848* [The history of the press in Hungary 1705–1848] (Budapest, 1979), 123, 221. I am also grateful to Gábor Pajkossy and Ferenc Kerényi for their information on the approximate number of printed pamphlets.

94 József Keresztesi, *Krónika Magyarország polgári és egyházi közéletéből a XIII. század végén* [Chronicle on the civil and ecclesiastical public life of Hungary at the end of the 18th century] (Pest, 1868); Madzsar, *Farádi Vörös Ignác viszszaemlékezései az 1778–1822. évekről*.

able to celebrate a renaissance, a genuine commitment to independent action and modernization replacing a policy that merely expressed the grievances of the Estates.” Kosáry was more circumspect as he pointed to the limitations of what he called “enlightened feudalism,” and he noted the heavy influence traditionalism still exercised in the country, but discussing the Enlightenment in Hungary gets disproportionately large attention in all of his articles and books.⁹⁵

The important question to ask is what real influence those committed to enlightened reform had in Hungary at that time? Not much, but it is important not to distort the analysis by carrying this conclusion too far. After all, Joseph II could count on many in Hungary who willingly worked in his regime, including Ferenc Kazinczy, who was positively pleased and proud of his position as a school inspector in the late 1780s. Yet a careful reading of writings by members of this group, and of the enlightened in general would also reveal a sense of frustration and loneliness as they were confronting heavy odds. Bessenyei wrote about his “moaning and fatigue” as he was searching for a “few golden nuggets buried under thick mud” in his country. In 1793, in a letter to János Kis, Kazinczy sounded desperate, “Everything (in this country) is unprepared... and so are we, writers and readers, totally unprepared... everything hinders us and no one is helping.” A year later, József Kármán was equally despondent, “We are where we started. A little buzzing, that has been all... we would need sophisticated minds to understand certain truths.” In his opinion, children and childish nations did not have that. “We, Hungarians, are still beginners,” wrote Gedeon Ráday to Kazinczy elsewhere.⁹⁶

The enlightened in Hungary instinctively sensed that and they tried to influence matters only in those areas where they had a chance of success, in the areas of religious tolerance and the promotion of Hungarian language and culture. Considering the real balance of forces in

95 Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs*, 8; Kosáry, 168–70; Kosáry, *Culture and Society in Eighteenth Century Hungary*, 50–1; Kosáry, “Felvilágosult abszolútizmus—felvilágosult rendiség,” 675–720; Domokos Kosáry, *Les reformes scolaires de l’absolutisme éclairé en Hongrie entre 1765 et 1790* (Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 1980), 1–27.

96 Kazinczy, *Az én életem*, 139–40; quoted in Lukácsy, *A végtelen jövő*, 89; Ferenc Kazinczy to János Kis, July 27, 1793, *Kazinczy* 2: 300; Kármán, *A nemzet csinosodása*, 10, 32; Gedeon Ráday to Ferenc Kazinczy, February 1, 1790, *Kazinczy* 2: 22.

the country, the enlightened made alliances with traditionalists, at least with those who shared their limited objectives. As we had seen, religious pluralism was gradually evolving for decades in an increasingly secularized environment. It was a traditionalist Hungarian poet, a Catholic priest no less, Pál Ányos, who wrote that “we should not recoil from each other’s religion... we do come from the same blood and share the same liberty,” although in another poem, savagely attacking Joseph II, he castigated the ruler for having granted rights to Protestant “heretics.” Nevertheless, moderate Catholic delegates to the diet of 1790–91, had a great deal to do with the end result, a law that retained the Catholic Church as the established state church of the country, but allowed nearly equal rights for the other Christian denominations.⁹⁷

Cultivation of and enjoyment in the Hungarian vernacular went back centuries, and to the traditionalist poets of the second half of the century, speaking and writing in Hungarian was a pleasure without any necessary political connotation. It was their duty, so they felt, to carry on with a cultural tradition. “Rejoice,” wrote one of them, Dávid Baróti Szabó, “our most sacred heritage is the language of our ancestors.” Although both Baróti and Ányos were ardent reactionaries on certain matters, in the areas of religious pluralism and of celebrating the country’s new intellectual/educational ferment, both poets, whatever their misgivings in the first instance, acknowledged it as a fact, and expressed their pleasure over the second. That in turn made it possible for enlightened men, such as Bessenyei and Kazinczy, to collaborate with them. Bessenyei picked Ányos as the most suitable secretary to a planned patriotic society, who, in turn, wrote several poems to

97 Emese Egyed (ed.), *Antológia a felvilágosodás magyar irodalmából* [Anthology from the Hungarian literature of the Enlightenment], 2 volumes (Cluj-Napoca, 1998–2000), 2: 62; quoted in Lajos Csetri, “A magyar nemzettudat változatai és változásai a jozefinus évtized költészetében” [The transformation of the Hungarian perception of nation in the poetry of the Josephinist period] in László Diószegi (ed.), *Magyarságkutatás* [Hungarian studies] (Budapest, 1996), 14; Marczali, *Az 1790–91. országgyűlés*, 2: 239. Even Father Leo Szeitz, an anti-Protestant firebrand, approached the Calvinist Kazinczy with the request to pass judgment over his poems. In return, Kazinczy praised Szeitz as a “good Hungarian stylist and as someone well-versed in Hungarian history.” *Kazinczy*, 2: 44, 46.

him, and Kazinczy edited a journal together with Batsányi and Baróti Szabó.⁹⁸

Naturally, collaboration did not mean fusion. Those who were enlightened had somewhat different arguments in promoting the Hungarian language. Bessenyei, for instance, by advancing the Hungarian language framed the problem comparatively, stressing what to him appeared as a totally a matter of fact proposition, namely that each country should have its own language. Not only for its own sake but because only a national vernacular could make knowledge truly popular in any given country. Sámuel Decsy went even further, arguing that only the Hungarian language as a means of universal education could forge mutual understanding between “gentlemen and servants, men and women, fathers and sons,” and assure their happiness.⁹⁹

Hungarian nobles, on the whole, were attached to Latin even more than to Hungarian as Latin was the foundation of their legal and political system. Tellingly, they named Latin as their *lingua gentis* and they attached an overriding importance to its preservation, because to them that was closely tied to the preservation of their privileges and way-of-life; its “abolition would sacrifice the heritage of our ancestors.” At the same time, the importance of Hungarian was also acknowledged by many nobles as the *materna lingua regni*, the more so because one need not to have had any schooling to do so. Furthermore, women too could participate. In this sense, the linguistic revival was part of a democratizing tendency among the nobility.¹⁰⁰ Although to the majority the supremacy of Latin was paramount, both languages were perceived as mainstays of national existence.¹⁰¹

98 Elemér Császár (ed.), *Deákos költők* [Latinate poets] (Budapest, 1914), 109; István Lőkös (ed.), *Ányos Pál válogatott művei* [The selected works of Pál Ányos] (Budapest, 1984), 70–3; Császár, *Deákos költők*, 86.

99 Szauder, *Bessenyei György válogatott művei*, 199, 201; D. Sámuel Decsy, *Pannóniai Féniksz, avagy hamvából feltámadott magyar nyelv* [Phoenix from Pannonia, or the Hungarian language that rose from its grave] (Béts [Vienna], 1790), 263–4.

100 Letter of May 20, 2008 of András Gergely to the author.

101 István Soós, “II. József nyelvrendelete és a ‘hivatalos’ Magyarország” [The language ordinance of Joseph II and “official” Hungary] in Ferenc Bíró (ed.), *Tanulmányok a magyar nyelv ügyének 18. századi történetéből* [Studies on the question of the Hungarian language in 18th century history] (Budapest, 2005), 288–91.

A combination of factors played a role in tilting the balance over to the appreciation of Hungarian, without necessarily diminishing the role of Latin. As pointed out previously, Hungary could not be hermetically closed off from the rest of Europe, and the triumph of the vernacular was a European-wide phenomenon. So was a certain emotionalism that thanks to Rousseau and to the widespread popularity of sentimental literature foreshadowed nineteenth century romanticism. In Hungary, poets and writers were part of that trend, and so were the newspapers. *Etelka* by Dugonics, *The Journey of a Country Notary to Buda* by Gvadányi, and *Hunniás* by Ádám Horváth Pálóczi, these works and others fanned the patriotic flames in Hungarian. Even a Latin-language journal, the *Ephemerides Budenses*, encouraged the cultivation of Hungarian.¹⁰² This trend coincided with “the politicization of language since the later eighteenth century,”¹⁰³ that became radicalized in opposition to Joseph II’s policies, devaluing national languages, cultures, and customs for the sake of an efficient and centralistic state. The result was a veritable explosion of all things Hungarian, in speech, in dress, as well as in many other ways. This was an emotionally much more satisfactory way of protest than petitioning in Latin would have been.

This phenomenon was not full-fledged nationalism, as the vast majority of participants had no desire to incorporate their fellow-Hungarians who happened to be serfs into their vision of a nation, although serfs in Hungary has certain rights; unlike serfs in Russia, they could not be sold or bought, and they had certain rights as defendants at the manorial courts. Still, this proto-nationalism was essentially a continuing defense of the nobility’s privileges but couched not in customary legalistic Latin terms but in flowery Hungarian. This resembled neither the French nor the German model. The first was “statist, unitarist, secular,” while the second emphasized not “universal values but the organic, cultural, linguistic or racial community—the Volk.” In Hungary, paramount importance was accorded to “feudal solidarity against the court” that was “stronger than any other ties.”

102 Piroska Balogh and Márton Szilágyi, “...quibus Linguae Hungaricae propagationi cordi est. Az *Ephemerides Budenses* a magyar nyelvhasználat kérdéseiről” [To whom the spreading of the Hungarian language was a labor of love: The *Ephemerides Budenses* on the usage of the Hungarian language), *ibid.*, 23–69.

103 R.J.W. Evans, “Language and state building: The case of the Habsburg monarchy,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 35 (2004), 3.

The revival of the vernacular played a critical role in all three of these cases, but while in their different ways the first two acknowledged the importance of vertical communication, that was non-existent or minimal in Hungary, which in turn meant a lack of a shared sense of identity, a mark of a modern nation according to Anthony Smith. Linguistic revival, in France for instance, was inching towards that goal by stressing the importance of not only the excellence or the beauty of the language but also its operability that described the intimate connection people maintained with their language, not only in small groups but across social divides, at least as an aspiration. Conversely, that was not the case in Hungary.

Nevertheless, as long as this proto-nationalistic frenzy lasted, many among the enlightened got caught up in it themselves. "No one should ruin my happy rapture," wrote Kazinczy, "with cold reasonings," as he witnessed the various manifestations of patriotic excesses.¹⁰⁴ In part, this was an understandable emotional reaction to what indeed appeared to be a patriotic renaissance. In part, it showed how much the reverence for the heritage of a heroic Hungarian past was shared by nearly all, both by the traditionalists and by the enlightened. Not surprisingly, because for all the differences between them, they were both integral parts of the same emotionally highly charged feudal milieu, thoroughly permeated by the idea of spilled Hungarian blood having saved Europe from the Turks, and such a past ought to have been glorified. Certainly, much of that past was invented or embellished, but there was always a degree of verifiable truth in it.¹⁰⁵ Selectivity nevertheless assured that heroism in that past was stressed above all. That made the search for ancestors among the ferocious Huns much more palatable than the recently discovered connection to the Finns.¹⁰⁶ In the eyes of both Dugonics and Bessenyei, deriving strength from the country's heroic past elevated Hungary to new heights. Still, differences between them point to a nuanced divergence in perspectives, similar to the two camps' somewhat different approaches to the revival of the Hungarian language. Dugonics was conscious of using his *Etelka* as a mirror into his country's present in order to "open Hungarian eyes" to the perfidy of Joseph II and of his

104 Kazinczy, *Az én életem*, 146–7.

105 Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*, 20.

106 Barta, 214.

“evil” advisors. The horizon of his brand of nationalism was narrow and provincial, as he had harsh words for the Slovaks, that echoed intolerant xenophobic utterances by others, though this kind of tone was not yet dominant in the discourse of the times. Also, Dugonics ridiculed Joseph for making Hungarians wear German dress, declaring that European, when in fact neither the Russians, nor the Serbs, nor the Turks, nor the Poles were wearing such European dresses. His scale of comparisons thus was limited to the familiar, and that in turn helped to make his book so immensely popular. In contrast, Bessenyei, in his epic poem *Hunyadi László tragédiája*, the hero appears as the paragon of virtue and nobility in the abstract, with the author claiming that his nation secured the rule of law to Europe even when it was pagan, and the reign of justice and light was ushered in without any wickedness upon its conversion to Christianity. Such a glorious past should enable Hungary to enter the family of nations on an elevated plane. Sámuel Decsy pursued a similar line of thought by emphasizing that only by living up to the heroic past, when Hungary was respected, could the country erase the shame of the present.¹⁰⁷ “Identity formation,” wrote Peter Burke, “has to be viewed as a collective construction,” and “collective identity might be called social memory.”¹⁰⁸ To the traditionalists, such as Dugonics, that was a straightforward affair, as they did not distinguish between past and present; what they thought was their ancestors’ identity was equated with their own. The enlightened projected their duality back to the past, an amalgam of faith in virtue and justice along with their glorification of heroic values.

As Alexandru Dușu pointed out, patriotism and cosmopolitanism in the second half of the eighteenth century were not antagonistical concepts but existed side-by-side. “Humanity, learning,” wrote Bessenyei, “pulled us together in this part of the globe, so when country and patriotism are being mentioned, it is Europe one is talking about.” Batsányi too mentioned the close connection between humanity and country and he also exhorted his compatriots to be “worthy of

107 András Dugonics, *Följegyzések* [Notes] (Budapest, 1882; originally published in 1790), 43–4, 41–2, 18; József Szauder, *Az estve és az álom*, 145–6; György Bessenyei, *Hunyadi László tragédiája* (Budapest, 1929; originally published in 1772), 62–3; Decsy, *Pannóniai Féniksz*, 271–3.

108 Burke, *The Art of Conversation*, 68–9.

our happy ancestors,” all in the same poem.¹⁰⁹ The traditionalists preferred to emphasize learning rather than humanity or the wider world. In 1780, both Ányos and Baróti celebrated what they perceived was the flowering of learning in Hungary as shown by the transfer of the university to Buda, with Ányos qualifying it in a comment written two years later. “Leave what is good and praiseworthy in the nation,” wrote Ányos, “and when we correct mistakes we should avoid opening up new wounds. Learning should not deal with useless hairsplitting but with teaching the laws of decency and piety.” Baróti in a poem, written in 1788, listed indiscriminately both enlightened and traditionalist writers and poets as contributing to a new dawn, that was made even more promising by Hungarians fighting the Turks simultaneously. “We should rejoice” was Baróti’s last line in the poem.¹¹⁰ For all their different emphasis, overlaps between the two groups were such that even Éva H. Balázs, who preferred to view this period in sharply distinct categories, remarked, “it is difficult to distinguish between those who profess to be progressive and those who only wish to preserve their feudal privileges.” Along this line, Margaret Yves noted that enlightened reformers were crying when the crown was solemnly returned to Buda, while the “hard core of traditionalists” supported their prejudices by words borrowed from Rousseau and Montesquieu.¹¹¹

The diet of 1790–91 signaled both the culmination and the defeat of this trend. The issue of the Hungarian language took up considerable time and energy at the diet; many speakers, including aristocrats, were orating in Hungarian and the proposal was advanced that Hungarian should be the country’s official language. This proposal, however, was watered down upon opposition by the court and by Croatian delegates, who were adamant in their defense of Latin. At the

109 Alexandru Duțu, “Die Discussion um Kosmopolitismus und Patriotismus in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhundert” in Moritz Csáky and Reinhard Hagelkrys (eds.), *Vaterlandsliebe und Gesamtstaatsidee im Österreichischen 18. Jahrhundert* (Wien, 1989), 10; quoted in László Vajthó (ed.), *Bessenyei György válogatott írásai* [The selected works of György Bessenyei] (Budapest, 1961), 42; Egyed, *Antológia a felvilágosodás magyar irodalmából*, 72–3.

110 Lőkös, *Ányos Pál válogatott művei*, 70–3, 91–2; Zalabai, *Baróti Szabó Dávid*, 8, 32.

111 Éva H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely, a reformpolitikus*, 151; Margaret C. Ives, *Enlightenment and National Revival: Patterns of Interplay and Paradox in late Eighteenth Century Hungary* (London, 1979), 15–6.

end, only the inclusion of Hungarian as a subject matter at institutions of higher learning was passed as a law.¹¹²

This compromise could have been the metaphor for much of this diet. King Leopold cleverly manipulated the nobles; he stopped the unpopular war against the Ottoman Empire and nipped in the bud a brewing noble conspiracy against the Habsburgs by a combination of divide and conquer tactics, cajoling, and the use of an efficient secret service. Furthermore, the French Revolution began to cast a threatening shadow over members of the nobility, even before it turned truly radical. Nevertheless, certain reforms were instituted, and among them the elevation of non-Catholic churches to near-equal status with the Catholic Church was certainly the most significant. In addition, the edicts of Maria Theresa on the serfs and the amelioration in the status of Jews were reaffirmed.¹¹³ Article 10 declared the country “free and independent that should be governed by its own laws and customs.”¹¹⁴ Although this law sounded radical, it in fact merely confirmed the basic rights of the nobility, representing the *ország* (“country”) *vis-à-vis* the crown.¹¹⁵

Two more laws should merit attention: Article 42 prohibited torture, saying that torture was “an inappropriate means to search out the truth; rather, it is a form of punishment.” Article 43 allowed non-nobles too to enjoy the same privileges nobles had when appealing verdicts in criminal trials.¹¹⁶ Although the ideas of the Enlightenment may have had some influence over delegates when these laws were passed, it is more plausible to assume that these laws were the products of the long drawn-out process of the rise in cultural sensibilities. Thus, to call this diet a *Reformlandtag* is an exaggeration; János Barta is closer to

112 Gábor Pajkossy, “Az abszolútizmus és a rendiség utolsó küzdelmei. Az első reformtörekvések (1790–1830)” [The last struggles between absolutism and feudalism: The first efforts at reform (1790–1830)] in Gergely, *19. századi magyar történelem*, 136.

113 Berenger and Kecskeméti, *Parlament et vie parlementaire en Hongrie 1608–1918*, 236.

114 Pajkossy, “Az abszolútizmus és a rendiség utolsó küzdelmei,” 136.

115 László Péter, “The irrepressible authority of the *Tripartitum*” in János M. Bak, Péter Banyó, and Martyn Rady (eds.), *The Laws of the Medieval Country of Hungary*, 5 volumes (Budapest, 2005), 5: xvii.

116 Gábor Pajkossy (ed.), *Magyarország története a 19. században. Szöveggyűjtemény* [Hungary’s history in the nineteenth century: Collection of texts] (Budapest, 2003), 36.

the truth when he wrote that “the previous high-sounding noble-national program was largely narrowed down to the securing of privileges.”¹¹⁷ The dominance of the traditionalist nobility did remain unchallenged. Furthermore, for most of the eighteenth century, the delegates had some flexibility in carrying out these instructions, but from the diet of 1790–91 on, the counties started to insist that their delegates rigidly adhere to the given instructions. Most of the noblemen grew frightened by the French Revolution, and that in turn led to a strong desire on their part to keep Hungary firmly anchored to the rigid framework of its “ancient constitution.”¹¹⁸

The decision that nine committees should be set up to discuss the further possibilities of reforms has created a retrospective progressive aura around this diet, which is only partially warranted. The presence of several veterans of Josephinist reforms, Baron József Podmaniczky, Miklós Skerlecz, and Count Lajos Török, to name a few, assured the high quality of proposals. Sadly for them, selection to the various committees was stacked in favor of the traditionalists. Hard as the reformers worked, producing hundreds of recommendations, those were shelved in time and eventually allowed to languish and die.¹¹⁹ In every European country, and Hungary was no exception, there were radicals among the enlightened. Some of them wished to influence the course of history through the force of their moral example. The so-called illuminati among the freemasons were such radicals. This group was so secretive that there have only been guesses about who if anyone in Hungary belonged to it.¹²⁰

The Martinovics conspiracy was another matter. Ignác Martinovics was a onetime Franciscan friar, a mentally unstable person who became

117 Moritz Csáky, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus. Studien zum Früh liberalismus in Ungarn* (Wien, 1981), 51; Barta, 214.

118 Vilmos Sági, “Az országgyűlési követek helyzetének főbb kérdései a reformkori átalakuláskor” [The principal questions concerning the situation of the delegates at the Age of Reform], *Jogtudományi Közlöny* 18, no. 4 (1963), 215; *Diéta*, 383–4.

119 Gábor Pajkossy, “Törekvések a magyar rendi alkotmány korszerűsítésére az 1790-es évek első felében” [Attempts at modernizing the Hungarian feudal constitution in the first half of the 1790s] in Gábor Pajkossy, János Poór, and Éva Ring (eds.), *Tanulmányok H. Balázs Éva 70. születésnapjára* [Studies in honor of the 70th birthday of Éva H. Balázs] (Budapest, 1985), 169–73.

120 Vermes, “Ideál és valóság. Szabadkőművesek Magyarországon a 18. században,” 101–2.

both an enlightened scholar and a government spy. The larger and relatively more moderate society he organized, "The Society of Reformers," wished to put pressure on the nobility to execute substantial reforms. Its members were left in the dark about the plan of violently overthrowing the regime by the "true" radicals in the "Society of Liberty and Equality." As was mentioned earlier, the radicals wanted to impose their vision on a still strong traditionalist society rather than to make necessary compromises and adjustments, and consequently, both of their options were beyond any chance of succeeding. In 1794 the conspiracy was discovered, and in 1795 several of its leaders, including Martinovics, were executed. József Hajnóczy too was among them. His case was truly tragic because Hajnóczy was probably the truest disciple of the Enlightenment, a man who wished to do away with Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* and with all the injustices that the feudal system entailed. Way ahead of his times, he believed that a national assembly should represent the whole nation and not only the estates. Foreshadowing a demand for the serfs' emancipation, he wanted to abolish the robot and place the landlord-serf relationship on a new and more just contractual relationship. He was also a fine and much beloved human being, "a spiritual giant" according to Gergely Berzeviczy.¹²¹ The same Berzeviczy witnessed the executions and genuinely mourned their death. "They were," Berzeviczy wrote, "excellent people." József Keresztési's opinion was surely more representative of noble political opinion. "French thinking," wrote Keresztési, "penetrating the country, produced a wicked society... that aimed at destroying royal rule and the country's constitution." He was pleased over the executions and imprisonments.¹²² Upon the impact of the radicalization of the French Revolution, traditionalist leanings were reinforced among most members of the nobility, with an even stronger defensive edge. With only a very few exceptions, the more forward-looking minority followed suit. By the time another diet convened in 1796 there was no more talk, not even talk, of reforms. Even the surface turbulence of waves passed, the sea was quiet and calm again, quiet and calm from top to bottom.

121 János Poór (ed.), *Hajnóczy József* (Budapest, 1998), 8–23, 106–7, 184.

122 H. Balázs Éva, *Berzeviczy Gergely*, 215–6; Keresztési, *Krónika Magyarország polgári és egyházi közéletéből*, 377.

CHAPTER 4

The Slow Erosion of Traditionalism

Perhaps no other writer more eloquently registered the reversal of steady progress in Hungary's spiritual and intellectual fermentation than József Kármán, whose *A nemzet csinosodása* [The nation is becoming refined] in the last issue of *Uránia* in 1795 was the swan song of that brief period of intense activities. Mincing no words, his essay was an epitaph, writing that "we are very far from perfection... the love of knowledge has not yet awakened here, and nations who are passing us by on that path consider us a crude nation."¹ His last-minute, desperate attempts to save his journal further underlined the gloomy points that he was making in his essay. One request, sad and resigned in tone, was directed to Count György Festetics. "We have one more issue to publish," wrote Kármán with his associate, Gáspár Pajor, on March 28, 1795, adding that "we owe this to ourselves and not to our ungrateful country. Then we can stop our literary endeavors and wait quietly for better times to come. ... Our sad experience showed us that our trust in the nation was misplaced." Another request was sent to some of the counties, such as Szatmár. Although Count Festetics had aided the journal in the past, no help was forthcoming this time. The journal ceased publication, which had already happened to Kazinczy's *Orpheus* in 1790, and Batsányi's *Magyar Museum* in 1793.²

The radicalization of the French Revolution and discovery of the Martinovics conspiracy in the mid-1790s naturally fuelled fears, verging on paranoia, both in the ruling circles in Vienna and among the bulk of the nobility in Hungary. Even before the French Revolution turned truly bloody and even before the conspiracy in Hungary was

1 Kármán, *A nemzet csinosodása*, 10.

2 Katalin Fehér and György Kókay (eds.), "*Tekintetes szerkesztő úr!*" *Levelek a magyar sajtóról 1790–1848* ["To the Distinguished Editor." Letters from the Hungarian press 1790–1848] (Budapest, 1990), 88; György Kókay (ed.), *A magyar sajtó története 1705–1848* [The history of the Hungarian press, 1705–1848] (Budapest, 1979), 224–7; Márton Szilágyi, *Kármán József és Pajor Gáspár Uránia* [The *Uránia* of József Kármán and Gáspár Pajor] (Debrecen, 1999), 321–2.

hatched, such an enlightened monarch as Leopold II had felt compelled to resort to a series of defensive maneuvers. His successor, Francis I, bore the brunt of burdens deriving from the confluence of events in France and Hungary. In his case, adjustments to circumstances were relatively easy. C.A. Macartney has well characterized Francis I as “a man of extreme mental timidity,” because Francis I did, indeed, fall into the mould of defensiveness with consummate ease. His circle of close advisors, Count Franz Colloredo and Freiherr Anton von Baldacci, were deeply conservative men, totally in agreement with their sovereign.³ His regime was Josephist in its attempt to enhance state power as much as possible, but, at the same time, it was bureaucratic and ossified without the creative spirit and reforming zeal of the original model.⁴

It was this clumsy bureaucratic machinery that came crashing down on Hungary following the destruction of the Martinovics conspiracy. The ensuing oppression should not, of course, be measured by twentieth century standards. No mass executions or even mass imprisonments took place, and the private lives of most subjects were by and large left undisturbed. Still, censorship was tightened, and both reading societies and lending libraries were banned. In 1803, a censorship committee retroactively banned thousands of books that had been published during the period of ferment. Government agents were instructed to confiscate subversive books at the borders.⁵ The powers of the police, not only those in some official capacity, but also the mostly anonymous informers, were greatly expanded. Count Johann Anton Pergen was in charge of the police during the initial period of the reign of Francis I. Pergen was firmly convinced that, even after the discovery of the Martinovics conspiracy, continued danger to the Monarchy demanded “unremitting vigilance” by the police. Suspicion, therefore,

3 C.A. Macartney, *Hungary: A Short History* (Chicago, 1962), 126; Gyula Szekfű, *Iratok a magyar állami nyelv kérdésének történetéhez, 1790–1848* [Documents discussing the history of the Magyar official language of the state between 1790 and 1848] (Budapest, 1926), 63–4; hereafter cited as *Iratok*.

4 There were a few exceptions such as the Criminal Code of 1803, the General Civil Law Code of 1811, and tentative efforts at reform by Archduke Charles and Cont Johann Phillip Stadion in the early 1800s and by Prince Clemens von Metternich later on. Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge, 2006), 104–24.

5 Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, 223.

became the prevailing sentiment, making the dynasty “incapable of profiting from the genuine popularity it enjoyed.”⁶

Some of the sensitive survivors of the ferment were devastated. “We barely woke up from our lazy dreams we had indulged in for centuries,” wrote the poet Mihály Csokonai Vitéz to Count Ferenc Széchényi on January 23, 1798, “and now we are asleep again. All of our efforts are gone... barely anything is published, except prayer books and calendars. Our theater died in its infancy, reading is diminished, and most of our writers either died, fell into trouble, or became mute. No one is spurring them on.” Five years later, in a letter of March 1, 1803 addressed to printers, Csokonai was at pains to emphasize that he would not interfere in matters of politics, and consequently, the censor should not misinterpret and thus delete “my innocent jokes that can be found in my poetry.”⁷

This widespread system of spying and snooping undoubtedly reinforced an already deeply entrenched suspicion against Vienna. According to János Poór, these suspicions “poisoned interpersonal relations,” which he illustrated with several concrete examples. Indeed, meddling by the police could be extremely annoying. In one instance, around 1800, an anonymous informer assumed that certain people in the town of Szombathely were forming a Jacobin Club. The basis for his suspicion was their meeting in each other’s apartments or houses from time to time. His report found its way to Palatine Joseph’s office, who duly reported it to the court. The investigation did not confirm the informer’s suspicion, because the people involved did nothing nefarious; rather, they were playing cards and doing some reading. Nevertheless, the Council of State instructed the judge in charge to keep an eye on them and report immediately should anything truly suspicious occur.⁸

6 Paul B. Bernard, *From the Enlightenment to the Police State: The Public Life of Johann Anton Perger* (Urbana, 1991), 225; Jean Berenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1700–1918* (London, 1997; originally published in French in 1990), 128.

7 István Harsányi and József Gulyás (eds.), *Csokonai Vitéz Mihály összes művei* [The collected works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz], 3 volumes (Budapest, 1922) 2: 645–6, 762.

8 János Poór, *Kényszerpályák nemzedéke, 1795–1815* [The generation of a constrained path 1795–1815] (Budapest, 1988), 73–6; Dávid Angyal, “Magyar politikai perek a XIX. század első éveiben” [Hungarian political trials in the first years of the 19th century], *Századok* 50, nos. 7–8 (1916), 433–4.

To place this and other similar incidents in perspective, Gábor Pajkossy claims that, for all the annoyance these incidents caused, and some were more than annoying, given that they could lead to a “break in one’s career,” they carried no great significance in the country’s history. Even during the “golden age” of spying during the 1830s and 1840s, the number of informants did not exceed one or two hundred.⁹ Furthermore, the majority of noblemen felt, with good reason, that they had nothing to fear from the police, and the general atmosphere of suspicion affected them marginally, at most. For example, during the middle and late 1790s, the memoirs of József Keresztesi and Ignác Farádi Vörös contained many accounts of their comings and goings, evidence of concern about their properties, and other mundane events, but did not give even the slightest hint of various adverse events that had ruined the lives of some of their compatriots.¹⁰

Even more to the point, the mid-1790s brought about a convergence of interests. Both the court and the bulk of the nobility felt threatened by the impact of the French Revolution, and, in time, by Napoleon. These threats, real, imagined, and overblown upon occasion, did not by any means eliminate the grievance mentality and resentments in Hungary against Vienna, but did somewhat relegate them to the background. As a result, a modicum of cooperation between the court and the estates did become a possibility for close to two decades. Consecutive diets voted, however grudgingly at times, for about a million recruits and thirty million florins in order to fight the wars against France during this period. Thus, the diets “provided a focus, not only for discontent, but also for a series of grand reconciliations.” This kind of cooperation was European-wide, because even conservative monarchs recognized that they could convert onetime enemies into allies in order jointly to stem the tide of the revolutionary “spirit.”¹¹

9 Pajkossy, “Az abszolutizmus és a rendiség utolsó küzdelmei,” 145.

10 Keresztesi, *Krónika Magyarország polgári és egyházi közéletéből*, 378–82; Madzsar, *Farádi Vörös Ignác visszaemlékezései*, 152–64.

11 Kosáry, 207; Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, 223; R.J.W. Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem, 1790–1848” in R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c. 1683–1867*, 175; Volker Press, “A nemesség a XIX. században. A régi Európa vezető társadalmi rétegei a polgári-demokratikus korban” [The nobility in the 19th century: The leading social strata of Old Europe in the bourgeois-democratic age] in László Kontler (ed.), *Túlélők. Elitek és társadalmi változás az újkori Európában* [Survivors: Elites and social change in Modern Europe] (Budapest, 1993), 18.

Although cooperation between Vienna and the estates in Hungary was real, it was based on a joint antagonism to a common enemy, rather than on any kind of mutual esteem. The general Austrian view of Hungary as an uncivilized country prevailed, while Hungarians resented being regarded as uncouth barbarians. They also bristled over their treatment by Vienna as only one among their monarch's several dependent peoples, even though this was true only in principle and not generally in practice. After all, despite its interferences, Vienna honored the autonomy of the counties, and even the diets were regularly convoked during the first dozen years of the nineteenth century. However, the nobles of Hungary, like the proud Polish and Spanish nobilities, perceived themselves as equal partners to their respective monarchs, rather than as their mere subjects.¹²

This view of the Hungarian nobles was based on their conviction that they were heirs to the Christian saviors who had prevented a Turkish conquest of Europe, as well as their self-perception that they represented the essence of a freedom-loving and freedom-fighting nation that had produced a living constitution through the ages. Consequently, these nobles regarded their country, and not the Austrian half, as the central core of the Monarchy, a belief reinforced by their rescue of Maria Theresa in 1741, successful resistance to Joseph II, and repeated claims of assistance in the wars against France. During this period, they came to view their constitution as a "sacred document." Its veneration and defense turned this view into a virtually universal axiom.¹³

The Hungarians set up a passionate veneration of what was essentially a collection of deeply rooted customary laws against the "arid dynastic legalism"¹⁴ of Francis I's regime. As a result, the union between a dynastic and bureaucratic Austria and a noble-led constitutional Hungary was constructed of ever more irreconcilable components, making the latter "the Habsburgs'... most ungovernable realm."¹⁵ That it was

12 Press, "A nemesség a XIX. században," 14.

13 Such a "constitutional sensibility" was shared by all nobles regardless of their social status, region, or religious denomination. Poór, *Kényszerpályák nemzedéke*, 174.

14 R.J.W. Evans, "Josephinism, 'Austrianness' and the revolution of 1848" in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (eds.), *The Austrian Enlightenment and Its Aftermath* (Edinburgh, 1991), 148.

15 Evans, "The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem," 174.

even possible to govern Hungary had to do with a certain degree of inertia and routine, but, more importantly, with a mutual recognition that papering over differences was necessary, because the price of separation would have been too high for both sides. This was made clear by the Hungarians' repeated manifestations of loyalty, which was made conditional upon the monarch's taking the coronation oath, obliging him or her not only to defend the country, but also to honor its "ancient laws." The mental trick Hungarians played by viewing their monarchs as Hungarians, along with their implicit acknowledgment that being part of a large state was a protective shield against real and potential enemies, did keep them loyal to the Habsburgs. However, they defined this loyalty on their own terms. No more patriotic Hungarian existed in this period than István Horvát, the young librarian, amateur linguist, and historian. In a letter to Ferenc Kazinczy, Horvát expressed his hope that his son, Árpád, and Kazinczy's children liked each other as much as their fathers did, and, he added, the joint motto of these children should be, "King, Country, and Hungarian Glory."¹⁶

As for the Habsburgs, even Francis I, for all of his limitations, understood the essentially conservative nature of the Hungarian constitution, which could be enlisted in his major concern, that is, defending the *status quo*. "The whole world is crazy," he said to a deputation from Pest County in 1820, "running after imaginary constitutions. You have a Constitution which you received intact from your ancestors. Love it: I, too, love it and will preserve it and hand it down to our heirs."¹⁷

Amidst the maze of bluffing, manipulations, posturing, and mutual recriminations that reflected what was irreconcilable in Austro-Hungarian relations, a solid core of reciprocity did nevertheless exist. Both sides wished to maintain a tenuous balance between dynastic Austrian and particularist Hungarian interests, as long as their shared ideological commitment to resisting fundamental social and political changes remained identical, as they, indeed, did for most of the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

What, then, did Habsburg ambivalence *vis-à-vis* Hungary entail? During the early 1800s, the broad outlines of later developments in Habsburg-Hungarian relations were already present. Both side bene-

16 István Horvát to Ferenc Kazinczy, October 28, 1820, *Kazinczy*, 17: 273.

17 Quoted in C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1018* (New York, 1969), 153.

fitted from what may be characterized as “a marriage made in heaven.” The Habsburgs gained more territory, taxes, insufficient as they may have been, soldiers for their armies, and cheap agricultural and mineral imports. In return, the Hungarians gained security and access, however limited, to programs of modernization that had already started with the reign of Maria Theresa.

Yet, perfect symmetry rarely works out smoothly in history, because when different cultures and traditions are under pressure to blend, the consequences become naturally warped, resulting in ill-fitting and discordant institutional and mental structures. In this light, Habsburg–Hungarian coexistence was also “a marriage made in hell.” According to R.J.W. Evans, “it was a battle between two administrations... [and] Hungary’s political stagnation resulted from an impasse between two more or less equally matched parties, both seeking dominance, one from above, the other from below.”¹⁸ Evans also discussed how perceptions of “the other” functioned in a corrosive manner. Austrians generally failed “to see any Hungarian point of view.” Apart from a few exceptions, their utterly scornful verdicts about Hungary and the Hungarians condemned Hungary’s “backwardness and obscurantism, her oppressive seigneurs and noble exemptions” and “a general lack of sympathy [was] usually compounded by ignorance and misconception.”¹⁹

On their side, Hungarians, thrown on the defensive, were stubbornly nurturing their grievances. These could never be rectified. They were often unrealistic, as the perennial demand for the royal couple to move from Vienna to Buda, demonstrated. Nor could the institutional and psychological gulf between the two sides be obliterated. István Horvát was a traditionalist and loyal to his sovereign, but, when he attended the examination at the university of Baron Ignác Eötvös, who had passed it with distinction and, as a reward, received a ring from the king, Horvát was not pleased. He bitterly remarked that he knew Eötvös would become a “bad patriot, and that ring would make him lose his senses as Austria’s defender.” In another part of his diary, Horvát wrote about “the cunning people of the House of Habsburg and the treacherous efforts perpetrated by the very same.”²⁰ Any

18 Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem,” 182, 183, 185.

19 Ibid., 177, 190, 187–8.

20 Alfréd Temesi and Józsefné Szauder (eds.), *Mindennapi. Horvát István Pest-Budai naplója: 1805–1809* [Everyday: The Pest-Buda diary of István Horvát, 1805–1809] (Budapest, 1967), 177, 1805; 437, 1806.

attempt to recreate the mental framework of the Hungarian political and cultural elite of those times must recognize that, particularly for a proud people with a history that they perceived as heroic, which led them to think of themselves “as the saviors of Christian Europe,” it must have been galling to be consistently on the receiving end of ridicule and contempt, to be viewed as unreconstructed and unreformable “barbarians.”

While this polarized picture reflected part of the Habsburg–Hungarian relationship, reality, usually replete with overlaps and grey areas, is rarely so stark. It was true that Hungary was often neglected and treated with contempt, but it was also true that the Habsburgs could not afford that country to sink below a certain level. What ensued from this recognition were improvements in infrastructure, settlement policies, and matters of “taxes, peasant questions, military supply, trade, communications, religion, charities, education, medicine, etc.”²¹ Some of these, but not all, improvements were sabotaged in the counties. However, in a few instances, “the sides actually shared many objectives, and the battle lines were by no means clearly drawn.”²²

Palatine Joseph, a Habsburg archduke and a younger brother of King Francis I, represented the most persuasive illustration of this kind of situation. Palatine for over fifty years, between 1796 and 1847, came to develop a sympathetic understanding of his adopted land and proved, in time, to be a popular mediator between court and country. He also contributed a great deal to making Pest-Buda the real capital of Hungary by becoming the chairman of an improvement commission in 1808. In this capacity, he presided over several projects, including the demolishing of the old town walls, broadening of streets, and establishing charitable institutions, including the Institute for the Blind.²³

Part of Vienna’s predicament centered around an urge to exercise control, which the Habsburgs could carry out only in a limited sense, because Hungary’s political structure and traditions of autonomy would have made total control impossible. The Habsburgs did perpetuate frequent petty and almost always annoying interferences in Hungary. For instance, it was an insult to national pride when, after the

21 Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem,” 177.

22 Ibid., 185.

23 Lóránt Radnai, “A szépítő bizottság elnöke: József nádor” [The president of the Improvement Commission: Palatine Joseph], *Budapest* 18, no. 12 (1996), 39–40.

chair of the Hungarian language and literature became vacant, the authorities in charge filled the position by selecting the least worthy of the candidates, Ferenc Czinke, a total nonentity, who became a laughing-stock during his decades of tenure (1809–30).²⁴ The Ratio Educationis of 1806 improved the subject matter of instruction, but its general trend was regressive. Latin was again emphasized at the expense of teaching sciences and modern languages.²⁵ Censorship bore the brunt of patriotic discontent.²⁶ In 1815, one case outraged Kazinczy, because an innocuous book by the author, György Károly Rummy, a German-speaking paragon of Hungarus loyalty, was again proscribed by the censor in Buda. “Horrible times!” Kazinczy complained.²⁷

On the other hand, Palatine Joseph’s influence was largely beneficial. Even his rather obtuse brother, King Francis I, made a point of paying a visit to the library and collection of antiquities at the National Museum in Pest in 1814, where he praised the progress that the Museum had made in the previous few years.²⁸ Hungary thus remained in a kind of cultural limbo in Austrian eyes, partly barbarian, partly progressing, a psychologically unbalanced situation that was bound to spark growing Hungarian disenchantment in the decades to come.

THE WAR-TIME DIETS

The war that broke out between Austria and France in April 1792 lasted, with interruptions, until 1815. This engagement became, in time, part of a much larger military enterprise. What started out as an ideologically motivated attack by the armies of the French Revolution was transformed into multiple campaigns for French glory by Emperor Napoleon. Daniel A. Bell describes this warfare as new, because, in his judgment, a novel “culture of war” replaced the old aristocratic war

24 *Iratok*, 91; Antal Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet* [History of Hungarian literature] (Budapest, 1943), 224.

25 Domokos Kosáry, “Az oktatásügy a haladó törekvések hullámvölgye idején (1790–1830)” [Pedagogy at the nadir of progressive efforts (1790–1830)] in Horváth, *A magyar nevelés története*, 223.

26 Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem,” 188.

27 Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, January 5, 1815, *Kazinczy*, 12: 301.

28 Ottó B. Kilényi, “A Szent Szövetségben egyesült uralkodók látogatása Buda-Pesten” [The visit by the rulers of the Holy Alliance in Buda-Pest] *Városi Szemle* 16, no. 2 (1930), 1403.

fare based on “aristocratic values of honor and service,” with results that were “apocalyptic.” These wars were fought, according to Bell, with “a radically new scope of intensity... that drove the participants relentlessly toward a condition of total engagement and the abandonment of restraints,” meriting the label as the first “total war.”²⁹

The problem with this concept lies in assuming that all sides of the conflict practiced total mobilization, when, in fact, only the French consistently did it. While they did, indeed, become proficient in utilizing manpower to the maximum degree, the armies of the anti-French alliance were generally inadequate in measuring up to French challenges and had “an incorrigible taste for dispersing their troops.”³⁰ In addition, the French introduced new strategies, such as the idea of relentless offensives by infantrymen “en masse” and meritocratic practices of promotion among the officer corps.³¹

The “first total war” theory is also deficient, because its propagator finds it a useful term only if it is placed “in a broad political and cultural context.”³² However, Europe at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a far cry from any kind of political or cultural homogeneity. In areas where the aristocratic tradition was still strong, practices of warfare were likely to resemble those that honored this tradition, especially if military campaigns only marginally affected or had no impact on the area in question. Hungary was a case in point. While it economically benefited from higher demands for its agricultural products, it was usually far away from the locations of battles. As a result, Hungary escaped both the ravages of war and also the sense of desperate urgency deriving from direct involvement.³³ Consequently, there was no reason why these wars would have eroded the country’s aristocratic traditions, and, indeed, they did not. The wartime

29 Daniel A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare As We Know It* (Boston, 2007), 5, 7, 8.

30 T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787–1802* (London, 1996), 128.

31 Ibid., 123, 125.

32 Bell, *The First Total War*, 8.

33 Michael Rowe, “Napoleon and the modernization of Germany” in Philip G. Dwyer and Alan Forrest (eds.), *Napoleon and His Empire Europe, 1804–1814* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 211. István Deák reminded me that the brutality of wars made “aristocratic values of honor and service” more of a slogan than a reality, but he agreed that the “levée en masse” by the French made their brand of warfare distinct from others.

diets—seven altogether—were far from completely uniform, but certain salient characteristics do stand out. The old contest between royal intentions and the defense of noble prerogatives was not gone. In fact, according to one interpretation, a kind of psychodrama, in which the suspicious court tried to tone down what it perceived as the voices of demagogues and make itself finally comfortable with a constitutional ritual, took place. The delegates were not truly united to pose a real threat to Vienna, but they were sufficiently united to impose such a ritual. Such a delicate balancing act included, at the diet of 1796, the court's rejection of grievances, but, at the same time, the acceptance of a brief article extending a 1790 law on the serfs' condition, an article that remained valid until 1836.³⁴

Whatever differences existed between Vienna and the estates, a sense of joint fear of the enemy minimized those differences. This was especially the case in 1796, when the memories of the terror in France and the Martinovics conspiracy were still vivid and when the armies of General Bonaparte conquered most of Italy. The government was in dire need of money, grain, fodder, horses, and soldiers, and the diet voted generous subsidies and a levy of 50,000 men.³⁵

The speech of the personalis at that diet, József Felsőbüki Nagy, was most revealing. He stressed the loyalty of the delegates to the king, "especially in these critical times." Felsőbüki characterized this loyalty as "a precious and glorious gift from our forefathers." He stated that "our king and his provinces are attacked by an enemy that is more dangerous than any enemy in the past," because "they [the French] bring tyranny under the guise of liberty... perpetual turbulence, every form of impiety... and the destruction of a happy and tranquil life." He then referred to the time when Hungarians had saved "the royal Austrian house in its gravest crisis," calling upon his compatriots to do the same again, not least because "the eyes of the entire Europe and especially of the enemy are on us almost alone."³⁶

At the diet of 1802, Personalis András Semsey opened the proceedings in Hungarian. His speech embodied an emerging ambivalence that was coming to characterize the attitude of many delegates. Above

34 Berenger and Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie*, 243–4.

35 Ibid., 243–4.

36 *Diarium Comitiorum Regni Hungariae a Serenissimo, AC Potentissimo Imperatore Hungariae, et Bohemiae Rege Francisco Secundo in Liberam, AC Regiam Civitatem Poseniensem in Diem 6 tam Novembris Anni 1796*. (Posonii, 1796), 2–3.

all, he proudly claimed unique status for Hungary. Unlike any other European country, he said, Hungary had preserved what was “ancient” in its original form and had rejected extreme innovations as “damaging and dangerous.” At the same time, Semsey warned that preserving everything without concern for changed circumstances was damaging and dangerous as well. “We have to have knowledge,” Semsey said, “as opposed to passion... that can deceive with its beautiful but false and perfidious tone.”³⁷

Insufficient attention has been paid to this ambivalence which, by its very nature, was somewhat indeterminate and inconclusive. It has been easier to postulate an unbroken line of progressive policies and ideas from the 1790s through the 1830s and 1840.³⁸ Insisting upon the importance of this ambivalence does not negate the presence of progressives—admittedly a very small minority—nor does it deny the preponderance of traditionalists. Rather, it advances the idea that some of the noble delegates to the diets were confronting practical problems around the margins of what had previously remained untouchable taboos, first and foremost, the defense of noble privileges. Such delegates, following Semsey’s advice, attempted the application of common sense solutions to problems, while others, the most obdurate traditionalists, usually in the majority, insisted that continuing adherence to traditions remained absolutely necessary. It is somewhat questionable to call common sense solutions to problems reforms. True, any amelioration of a situation amounts to reforming it, but to do so within a closed system and without a political platform deprives the concept of much, if any, value as a genuine reform. Ironically, the advocates of certain changes were probably not aware of the fact that at least

37 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1802dik esztendőben Felsőes Második Ferentz Római Császár, Magyar és Tseh ország koronás királya által Posony szabad királyi várossában pünkösöd havának 2dik napjára rendelt, s ugyanott azon esztendőben mindsztent havának napjában befejezett Magyar Ország Gyűlése* [Proceedings of the diet of 1802 in Pozsony] (Posony, 1802), 4–6.

38 The following books would fall into that category: Csáky, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus*; Károly Kecskeméti, *La Hongrie et le reformisme liberal. Problèmes politiques et socieaux (1790–1848)* (Rome, 1989); Ambrus Miskolczy, *A felvilágosodás és a liberalizmus között. Folyamatosság vagy megszakítotttság? Egy magyar történeztvíta anatómiája* [Between Enlightenment and liberalism: Continuity or discontinuity? The anatomy of a dispute among Hungarian historians] (Budapest, 2007); Miskolczy, *A modern magyar demokratikus kultúra “eredeti jellegzetességeiről.”*

some of the changes they were proposing would have the unintended consequences of undermining the very framework of absolutes that their forefathers and many of their contemporaries had never questioned.

Count László Teleki, a Transylvanian aristocrat, although he was not a delegate to any of the diets, exhibited exactly this kind of mentality in his most famous work on the Hungarian language, published in 1806.³⁹ Well-educated, he had studied in Vienna and Göttingen and travelled all throughout Western Europe. Yet, his mental and political profile was that of a traditionalist. In his book, he depicted Hungary's constitution as perfect for the country, establishing an equilibrium between "liberty of the estates and royal rights and prerogatives in such a way that assure the mutual progress and happiness of both." He also believed that there should be limits to free speech and that "any open attack on morality, religion, the constitution, and on the king's person should not be tolerated." At the same time, he left the door open for exceptions, thereby escaping the trap of rigid moral and political dogmatism. He made allowances for free speech "to define morality, purify religion, and rectify faults in the constitution." Teleki also advocated religious tolerance, commerce, and travel abroad, the latter to the point of requesting the counties to subsidize it for "promising young men who wish to study or acquire a skill." He deplored the poor state of schools in Hungary, from the village schools through the academies and the university, as well as the absence of pedagogy. He admired England the most and suggested the establishment of scholarly societies following the example of that country's Royal Society, adding that necessary precautions be taken so that such societies should not resemble the "subversive" French clubs that "undermine society's harmony"⁴⁰

In a similar spirit, some of the delegates to the 1802 diet proposed that servants to noblemen and their families should be exempt from taxation, that is, they should be emancipated. A majority opposed this suggestion, and the *status quo* was preserved. Another issue, preventing deforestation, held the delegates' attention during several sessions. Traditionalists claimed that the free exercise of property rights should

39 László Teleki, *A magyar nyelv előmozdításának buzgó esdeklései* [The zealous promotion of the Hungarian language] (Pest, 1806).

40 Ibid., 114, 115, 134, 135, 120–1, 127–31, 179.

not be obstructed and that any outside intervention by the counties would be uncalled for. Their adversaries retorted that the interest of the community should prevail over individual concerns and, responding to traditionalists' maneuvers to table the issue, rejected further evasions and excuses by stating that such delaying tactics would allow the destruction of entire forests. Should this nevertheless occur, it was decided that counties then had the right to intervene and fine violators. In other blows to traditionalists, the diet allowed the levying of taxes on noblemen who resided in towns and also consented to the employment of non-nobles in state and county offices, albeit only for relatively minor positions. In a related matter, advocates of changes argued that non-nobles should also be able to file suits against noblemen. After all, it was argued, the non-nobles may carry "sufficient values" enabling them to participate in the judicial process. Incensed traditionalists vehemently objected, because they claimed that those who encouraged non-nobles to sue would do so only to exploit them and that the urge to help poor people would end up "spoiling them." The personalis sided with the traditionalists, and the resolution spelled out that the vast majority of serfs who were under their landlords' control were prohibited from suing; only free non-nobles and residents of towns could do so.⁴¹

The state of Hungary's commerce has prompted much discussion. According to a twentieth century author, great advances were being made, because, in that author's judgment, associations of merchants from several towns had succeeded in placing their concerns on the diet's agenda and secured the support of the delegates for imparting a new impulse to the development of commerce in Hungary.⁴² Other sources however, indicate that reality was more complicated. Merchant associations issued a booklet in 1802, challenging the widely prevailing view of Hungary as an exclusively agricultural country and claiming that Hungary could never prosper without industry and commerce. The associations were nearly unanimous in their complaints about having been on the receiving end of contempt in comparison to the landowning class, a disdain reflected by the onerous tax burdens dis-

41 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1802dik esztendőben*, 191, 236–42, 308, 258, 262, 366–9.

42 Margit Hofhauser, *A kereskedő testületek mozgalma a magyar kereskedelem fellendítése érdekében a XVIII. század végén és a XIX. század elején* [The movement of the merchant associations for developing Hungarian commerce at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries] (Budapest, 1930), 58–61.

proportionately inflicted on them. The practical suggestions put forward by the merchant association included a revision of the Monarchy's customs policies and the development of easier credit. Not everything in this booklet was so forward-looking, because these associations also endorsed the outmoded guild system and incited hatred against the Jews, whose peddling activities they had condemned.⁴³

At the 1802 diet itself, opinions on the necessity of developing commerce were sharply divided. The traditionalists rightly sensed that such a development would cost money and could conceivably endanger their exemption from taxes. To prevent this from happening, one delegate denied the benefits of commerce altogether by declaring that "our ancestors had no ambitions in this regard." Opponents of this view, while conceding that expenses could not be avoided, predicted that the development of commerce "would both be splendid and useful to the nobles themselves." Furthermore, one of the delegates claimed to foresee the harm "if we do not follow other nations' examples in developing commerce or any other activity that would promote our civic happiness. The prosperity of our country depends on those." To members of this group, a canal built in Bács County, connecting the Danube and Tisza rivers, appeared to be so useful for nobles planning to use this canal that they had advocated contributing to its expenses. This apparent breach in their rigid support for exemption from taxes proved to be such a thorny issue that all kinds of semantic prevarications were applied. For example, such anticipated contributions by nobles were called "not really a tax which would be levied annually." The diet, acknowledging the explosive nature of this issue, postponed resolving it until the next diet.⁴⁴

The vagaries of the Napoleonic wars had a strong effect on the diet of 1805. Hungarian delegates were in a panic at a time when the Habsburg military fortunes were low. The diet was sandwiched between devastating military defeats against the French at Ulm in October, 1805 and at Austerlitz in December of the same year, with Vienna occupied and Pozsony itself threatened. These circumstances temporarily muted the discussion of certain subjects, such as encouraging commerce. Under such dire conditions, the delegates fell back on what

43 Gyula Kautz, *A nemzetgazdasági eszmék fejlődése és befolyása a közviszonyokra Magyarországon* [The development of economic ideas and their impact on public life in Hungary] (Budapest, 1868), 179–82.

44 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1802dik esztendőben*, 354, 355, 355.

had given them the most psychological support in the past, that is, their loyalty to the monarch and emphasis on Hungary's uniqueness. "There is no one among us," said Personalis Semsey, "who would not follow him [the king] during these dangerous times. ... 1741 should be our model." A Catholic clerical delegate added that Hungary's neighbors "expect us to be their example." Although a few delegates posed the question of a fairer distribution of the financial burdens, these voices were drowned in exclamations that "took innovations to be harmful," and everything remained as it had been before.⁴⁵

As for the issue of the Hungarian language, the delegates made speeches sufficiently bombastic to give them reassurance from their own utterances. Such statements as "the Magyar language embodies the nation's character and in fact maintains the nation" did not threaten the Habsburgs under siege. The diet's demands calling for bilingual representations to the Chancery and a requirement that the Vice-Regal Council should respond to entreaties from the counties in Hungarian were in fact quite modest.⁴⁶ The delegates had calculated correctly: the Council of State found nothing objectionable in these modest demands and consented to them. Among the many speeches made at this diet, perhaps the most bizarre—bizarre from the vantage point of contemporary realities, but most likely flattering to Hungarian ears at the time—came from the lips of a Habsburg Archduke, Palatine Joseph, who dramatically declared that "the enemy is threatening us, underestimating the Hungarian nation. Does Napoleon really believe that we have lost all hope? I can speak to this issue because the blood of Árpád flows in my veins, as well."⁴⁷ Customary grievances were not forgotten, but merely postponed until better times with one exception: the demand for the seaport Fiume to be annexed to Hungary, echoing past demands for the development of commerce.⁴⁸

Probably no diet brought out the conflict between diehard traditionalists and their opponents in sharper relief than the diet of 1808.

45 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1805dik esztendőben Felsőleges Második Ferentz Római Császár, Magyar és Cseh Ország koronás királya által Posony szabad királyi várossában mindszent havának 13dik napjára Rendelt Ország Gyűlése* [Proceedings of the 1805 diet] (Posony, 1805), 3, 6, 7, 10, 49.

46 *Ibid.*, 57; *Iratok*, 77, 272–3.

47 *Árpád* was the name of the military leader of pagan Magyar tribes who had conquered the Danube Basin in the late ninth century.

48 *Iratok*, 274.

Discussions centered almost exclusively on the topic of setting up a voluntary army of nobles to fight against the French. These were no mere academic discussions, because the reason that Hungarian nobles always claimed for justifying their exemption from taxes was the conventional argument that only they sacrificed their blood and lives in Hungary's defense. This argument generated a great deal of self-satisfaction in the abstract, but, when the demand for actual military service from the nobles became a reality in 1808, the Hungarian nobles were put on the spot.

The traditionalists were ready to embark on organizing an army again; they had a precedent as recent as 1797, although the forty thousand noblemen then in arms were never deployed in a battle. In 1808, one of them pointed out that, if equality among nobles meant anything, then rich nobles must also serve. To enlist only poor nobles would lead to "a breach of good taste... the country's strength rests in the poor nobles." Some suggested that non-nobles should also be recruited, which provoked an angry retort by a traditionalist. "How can we shove our duty onto the non-nobles?" he asked, ending with a *non sequitur*, "we should pay attention because Europe is watching us."⁴⁹ Yet, this suggestion kept re-surfacing, indicating a tacit recognition on the part of at least some of the delegates that the idea of a noble military effort was anachronistic. "Nobody can be forced to enlist, but if we do not form a large army, then we would be useless... the answer is to enlist non-nobles, who [if they are serfs] should be emancipated... after all, many of them were made noble in the past because they had fought heroically."

This suggestion fell on deaf ears. Some delegates were quite frank. "We love our country," stated one of them, revealingly adding that this was true "not for the sake of the common good but for our own preservation." Others brought up the question of internal security. "If we all go," cried out one delegate, "who would guarantee security?"—an obvious reference to protecting family members against possible peasant uprisings. "Not every nobleman is able to fight," spoke up a delegate, noting that "we would need time to awaken the old military fervor among them." A few delegates completely changed the subject. According to one of them, the priorities were all wrong, "Vienna should deal first with our grievances, the more so because we are inca-

49 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1805dik esztendőben*, 28, 71.

pable of taking part in any major trial of strength.”⁵⁰ All these excuses, evasions, and subterfuges, some justified but many certainly not, were unthinkingly and therefore unintentionally undermining the principle of the nobles’ exemption from taxation, and thus, its very foundation, the principles of noble exclusivity and superiority.

Sándor Kisfaludy’s “Patriotic appeal to the Hungarian nobility,” issued in 1809, contained perhaps the purest distillation of the traditionalist position. At the same time, it reflected the split between inflated self-esteem, on one hand, and anguish and agony, on the other, which had become, by then, a customary ambiguity within the Hungarian nobles. Inflated self-esteem not only sustained the self-justification of the nobility’s leading role in society, but also, because it was isolated from wider European influences, reinforced the kind of megalomania that resulted in the sincere belief that Hungary was an object of envy and admiration everywhere. The dark periods in the nation’s history were attributed to a moral decline. How a “depraved” nation had surmounted its own depravity and was now shining as a beacon was never explained, but it was implied that transcending the dark periods had constituted heroic feats in their own right. There were literary precedents, of course. Back in the seventeenth century, martyrology and hagiography had been bound together in various epic poems.⁵¹

The same duality appeared in a poem on the Battle of Mohács by Márton S. Etédi, published in 1792. Wondering if our “ruined country could ever be happy again,” he also remarked that “everyone was frightened of us, Turks and the Tatars alike.”⁵² Kisfaludy accentuated

50 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1808dik esztendőben Felséges Második Ferentz Császár, Magyar és Cseh Ország koronás királya által Posony szabad királyi városában kisasszony havának 3-ik napjára rendelt Magyar Országgyűlésnek* [Proceedings of the 1808 diet] (Posony, 1808), 128, 163, 218–9, 167, 169–70).

51 Levente Nagy, “Retorika és nemzeti mártírológia a XVII. századi magyar eposzokban” [Rhetoric and national martyrology in the Hungarian epic poems of the 17th century] in István Bitskey and Szabolcs Oláh (eds.), *Religio, retorika, nemzettudat régi irodalmunkban* [Religion, rhetoric, and national consciousness] (Debrecen, 2004), 316–29.

52 Márton S. Etédi, *Mohács, Magyar Gyász, vagyis Második Lajos magyar királynak a mohácsi mezőn történt veszedelme, melyet gyenge tehetsége szerint kívánt versekbe szedni egy nemzete romlását kesergő magyar* [Mohács, Hungarian Mourning, or the disaster of King Louis II in Mohács, which a Hungarian noble, notwithstanding his weak talents and despairing over his country’s ruin, is trying to put into verse] (Pest, 1792), 5, 10.

this duality in his appeal. "The Hungarian nobility is the first in the world," he wrote, "where every nobleman is a monarch and the king is the sovereign over thousands of these monarchs. ... All of them should be prepared to sacrifice their lives for their country, constitution and their king... those who would not do so do not deserve to be called nobles, and they should be sent as slaves to America." But then, in historical flashbacks, Kisfaludy wrote about the times when the country had been invaded by the Tatars and then the Turks and when "the strong and proud national soul died." By the time of Queen Maria Theresa, a revived nation saved her throne. Ignoring his own depictions of occasional national doom, Kisfaludy claimed that

for a thousand years we have been the strongest, the most noble, freest and happiest nation... when we rose up, all the other nations were terrified of us... and the nation conquered and soared in the air like an eagle. ... [W]ill our constitution be preserved or will it perish? ... [T]he choices are life or death, glory or shame, liberty or slavery, happiness or misery.⁵³

In reality, common sense considerations acknowledged by many noblemen weakened, if not undermined, this heroic baroque view. Many of them were quite prepared to avoid fighting Napoleon's army, a fact further aggravated by mutual distrust between the Habsburgs and the Hungarian nobility. Indeed, the court began to suspect the loyalty of the latter, while those in arms complained about their defective military equipment.⁵⁴ Only about one-half of the nobles in arms, roughly twenty thousand men, fought at the battle of Győr, in the summer of 1809. Archduke John's 25,000 regular troops made up the rest of the forces, and the French easily defeated these combined armies. The blame for this result primarily rested with the incompetent leadership of the Archduke. Although the Hungarian nobles honorably

53 Angyal, *Kisfaludy Sándor minden munkái*, 8: 12, 13, 37, 29, 57–8, 58, 61.

54 Károly Vörös, "A magyar nemesi felkelés a napóleoni háborúk korában" [The Hungarian noble insurrection during the Napoleonic Wars], *Nógrád megyei múzeumok évkönyve* 7 (1981), 97. "True," wrote the poet Dániel Berzsenyi to Kazinczy, "that the nobility is the foundation of our constitution, but by now the strength of the nobleman rests not in his arms but in his pocket." Dániel Berzsenyi, *Összes művei* [Collected works] (Budapest, 1968), 364; January 18, 1809.

acquitted themselves,⁵⁵ it was nevertheless clear that they were no match for Napoleon's battle-hardened and disciplined troops.

In spite of this fact, no lessons were learned from this fiasco, because the nobility refused to accept any blame and persevered in maintaining the fiction of an armed resistance when called for.⁵⁶ Deeply suspicious of anything coming from France, Hungary's nobles responded negatively to Napoleon's proclamation of 1809, in which he promised to restore Hungarian independence. By early July, 1809, one and a half months after issuing the proclamation, the French had to admit that they had failed to have an impact on the Hungarian nobility. "People are against us," dejectedly wrote the French general Montbrun.⁵⁷

Kisfaludy tried to live up to his ideals as a traditionalist patriot. He fought in the battle as an officer who was chosen by Palatine Joseph as his adjutant. Yet, he enthusiastically endorsed one aspect of Hungarian society, even though it was opposed by diehard traditionalists, and this was the development of commerce, which, he thought, was critical if the nation wished to remain free and strong.⁵⁸ As this example shows, the lines separating unbending traditionalists from their somewhat more flexible opponents were often blurred. No sharply defined ideologies distinguished the delegates from one another; rather, as issues came up, the delegates spoke up impromptu in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, names are rarely attached to speeches in the printed proceedings, but it is clear that disagreements existed on many issues, although no delegate ever questioned the fundamental social order of the country.

It was nevertheless possible that a delegate, unless he were adamantly opposed to any change whatsoever, voted one way on one particular issue and the opposite way on another. Only a few of them stretched the limits of what was acceptable within the existing constitutional framework. Count József Desseffy spoke up against secret informers, and, most surprisingly, Pál Felsőbüki Nagy mentioned the necessity of improving the serfs' lot at the 1807 diet. He was hooted down by the rest of the delegates with a Latin exclamation, "*Ne stul-*

55 Vörös, "A magyar nemesi felkelés," 98.

56 János Poór (ed.), *Adók, katonák, országgyűlések 1796–1811/12* [Taxes, soldiers, diets 1796–1811/12] (Budapest, 2003), 192–4.

57 Quoted in Domokos Kosáry, *Napóleon és Magyarország* [Napoleon and Hungary] (Budapest, 1977), 136.

58 Angyal, *Kisfaludy Sándor minden munkái*, 8: 51–2.

tiset!” (“Do not act foolish”). Some of the delegates to the 1808 diet were called the “English party,” because they had the British Parliament in mind as their model. Baron József Vay and Count József Dessewffy belonged to this group.⁵⁹

Those who had swayed from strictly traditionalist ways of thinking had most likely travelled in the west and/or attended universities there. Most universities, even in the west, remained citadels of conservative thinking, but certain new ideas did filter through them. While it was unlikely that many noble delegates to the diets became conversant with new philosophical and literary trends of their times, a few did. Although criticism was not willingly accepted because it was regarded by many, steeped in the classical ideas of harmony and the Christian concept of love, as repudiating both of these ideals, literature had become inextricably linked to literary criticism. In the early 1780s, for example, the poet József Rajnis rudely rejected the criticism of the journalist Mátyás Ráth, who responded in a mild way. Even so, Ráth received outraged complaints from his readers.⁶⁰ At the same time, traditionalist criticism did have a venerable history in Hungary—Faludi comes to mind—and it was implausible to assume that the ability and inclination to criticize would not in time turn against the absurdities of contemporary society. Indeed, Bessenyei and Csokonai ridiculed backward and uncultured nobles in their plays, Pontyi and Baron Ser-teperti, Koppóházi, and Tökkolopi, respectively. Literary criticism continued to exist even after 1795, despite severe censorship. Kazinczy, who had become the undisputed leader of the literati by the early part of the nineteenth century, awakened and fostered such a critical spirit.⁶¹

Beyond literature, the awakening and fostering of critical thinking was a key development. It was not yet a general phenomenon; most of the delegates to the subsequent diets remained rooted in a world of

59 Ede Wertheimer, “Az 1807-ik évi magyar országgyűlés” [The 1807 Hungarian diet], *Századok* 30, no. 4 (1896), 396–401; Kosáry, *Napóleon és Magyarország*, 121; Ede Wertheimer, *Az 1811/12-iki magyar országgyűlés* [The 1811–12 Hungarian diet] (Budapest, 1899), 50–1, 54, 69.

60 György Kókay, *A magyar hírlap és folyóírodalom kezdetei (1790–1795)* [The beginnings of Hungarian newspapers and journals (1790–1795)] (Budapest, 1970), 142–5.

61 Elemér Császár, *A magyar irodalmi kritika története a szabadságharcig* [The history of Hungarian literary criticism until the War of Liberation] (Budapest, 1925), 46.

unchanging absolutes, where no tradition could be questioned, let alone actually challenged. This apparent immobility was being eroded only very slowly and inconsistently by some of the common sense arguments to alleviate abuses, or, in the case of the noble insurrection, by certain actions or inactions. Many historians have had problems accepting how slowly and unevenly these processes functioned.

Perhaps Éva H. Balázs most radically expressed the widely believed view that a group of progressives, such as Gergely Berzeviczy, best represented the transition from the 1790s to the Age of Reform of the 1830s and 1840s. "Berzeviczy, Pál Czindery and others," wrote Balázs, "are not isolated figures but represent the elite of the Hungarian nobility with as much force and élan as the generation of the Age of Reform thirty years later."⁶² This enthusiastic evaluation is not borne out by the facts. It is not necessary to diminish the merits of Berzeviczy, who was an outstanding and far-sighted economist and a sharp critic of both Austrian economic policies and Hungary's feudal system, to agree with Ambrus Oltványi, who had characterized Berzeviczy as an isolated figure whose writings remained unpublished and pointed out that those that were published had provoked angry rejections by most of his contemporaries, including Kazinczy. Although Kosáry was skeptical about the far-reaching assertions of the Balázs school, he nevertheless maintained that progressive ideas survived as thin threads which operated surreptitiously in areas that the dominant "feudal nationalism" left open for them. Pajkossy went the furthest in critiquing the dominant views when he claimed that research has failed to demonstrate that "attempts at reforms survived the decades following 1795, and that they contributed to the establishment of the Age of Reforms."⁶³

These are valuable corrections. However, even when denying the validity of the more extreme interpretations, they, too, take as their starting point the role that progressives were presumed to have played or failed to have played in Hungarian history. Closer to reality is the claim that the Age of Reform grew out of a long period of gestation, filled with doubts, nuances, uncertainties, and indecisions, when common sense arguments were battling deeply-entrenched traditionalist

62 H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely, a reformpolitikus*, 203.

63 Ambrus Oltványi's book review of Moritz Csáky's *A felvilágosodástól a liberalizmusig* [From the Enlightenment to liberalism], *Valóság* 25, no. 3 (1982), 105; Kosáry, 209; Pajkossy, "Az abszolutizmus és a rendiség utolsó küzdelmei," 144.

ideas and customs. Only with the passage of time did these common sense arguments become infused with a liberal ideology. This was a protracted and painful process, in which progressive advances came usually piece-meal, in fits and starts, and suffered frequent reversals. Therefore, at least, the initial emphasis should not be placed on the progressives and their ideas, because they were insignificant for quite some time. Rather, the analytic emphasis should focus on the process itself and primarily stress the continuing powerful adherence to traditions.⁶⁴

The progression of common sense arguments was not necessarily linear, as the diet of 1811–12, deviating from that modest but demonstrably upward trend, illustrated. This diet became both defiant and retrograde in its opposition to the financial meltdown in the Monarchy. The wars were proving to be very expensive, and outlays were vastly exceeding revenues. The government resorted to the printing of money, drastically devaluing the currency down to one-fifth of its previous value, and then issuing more banknotes to stabilize the situation. The war continued, and so did the printing of even more money. Furthermore, the diet, not being consulted, faced accomplished facts that wrought damage on the financial interests of many delegates who were creditors and increased the tax burden on the serfs five-fold. At no other point did the incompatibility between Austria and Hungary become so evident. Whether the handling of the financial crisis was bungled or handled properly was less an issue in this case than the fact that the crisis was Monarchy-wide. Any solution had to come from the top, and therefore, Hungary's special status, by definition, could not be considered. The separatist tendencies and inflated self-esteem of Hungarians meant that this was exactly what they had expected to happen.

The majority of the delegates was hopelessly parochial and ignorant about financial matters. They offered no realistic alternative pol-

64 Kosáry's interpretation is not totally dissimilar to mine, because, in his analysis the eventual liberalism of the nobility grew out from "feudal nationalism," and that "many threads, tradition, and direct contacts" tied even liberal nobles to that (Kosáry, *Napóleon és Magyarország*, 155). My objection to his interpretation rests in my belief that circumstances were too complex and there were too many variants in the group to neatly define it as a single category of "feudal nationalists." Could, for instance, a delegate to one of the diets who proposed, however modestly and pragmatically, a modification of the nobles' exemption from taxation, still be classified as "feudal," or, if a Hungarian delegate came to accept the right of a non-Hungarian ethnic group to its own language and culture, could he still be labeled as a "nationalist?"

icy to Vienna, except for hoping to replace “bad” money with “good.” In the sessions of the diet, it was frequently mentioned that silver and gold should be introduced, but this was an “unfounded desire,” as were other suggestions.⁶⁵ Hungarian delegates also kept insisting that Hungary, a country with an “ancient constitution” and a heroic past, should be treated differently from all other parts of the Monarchy. Some of the delegates asserted that their country had nothing to do with what was happening in those other parts and that occurrences elsewhere should not even be mentioned, although a few delegates did argue that “we are allied with them, especially in matters of finances.” Generally, the delegates treated the king deferentially, but they heaped abuse on his advisors who, they believed, had given him “damaging advice.” An informer, called Leurs, commented on the proceedings with biting irony. “Twenty lawyers,” wrote Leurs, “from the fifteenth century wish to dictate what laws the sovereign should pass, the sovereign who rules over close to twenty million subjects.”⁶⁶

A resurgence of debates on the language question also took place. This was not a coincidence. “The [promotion of] the Hungarian language,” Ferenc Bíró astutely wrote, “was a compensation for the missing fabric of genuine independence.”⁶⁷ This became even more the case when the estates felt as impotent and on the defensive as they did in 1811 and 1812. True, the Napoleonic wars were winding down and the threat from France was receding, certainly so by 1813. However, the fear of being a small nation surrounded by non-Magyars came to weigh heavily on Hungarians, a fear that was the psychologically reverse side of national hubris. This fear was stoked by the German philosopher and writer, Johann Gottfried von Herder, who had predicted in 1791 the eventual disappearance of the Hungarians in the sea of Slavs and Romanians.⁶⁸ Ever since Bessenyei had raised the language issue, for him and especially for those who kept pressing on this issue following

65 Poór, *Adók, katonák, országgyűlések*, 213.

66 *Felséges Első Ferentz Ausztriai tsászár, Magyar és Cseh Ország koronás királyától Pozsony szabad királyi városába 1811-dik esztendőben kisasszony havának 25-dik napjára rendeltetett Magyar Ország Gyűlésnek jegyzőkönyve* [Proceedings of the 1811 diet] (Pozsony, 1810–1), 136, 1220, 1398, 1399; quoted in Wertheimer, *Az 1811/12-iki magyar országgyűlés*, 62–3.

67 Bíró, “Nyelv, tudományok, nemzet,” 590.

68 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (München, 2002 [1791]), 633.

Herder's gloomy forecast, an organic link between the preservation of the national language and national survival was assumed to exist. This assumption grew in importance to the point that the link itself became more important than the cultivation of the national language alone.⁶⁹

This background makes it explicable that debates at the diet of 1811–12 transcended the mere promotion of the Hungarian language and extended to discussing the intricate relationships between Hungarians and the ethnic minorities, as well as the conflict between the continuous use of Latin and promotion of the vernacular. Indeed, as some of the delegates expressed anxiety over the very existence of the nation, they had clearly come to regard curtailing the use of Latin and searching for a successful policy that would in time assimilate the ethnic minorities as a matter of great importance.

The tables in these debates were turned, because the traditionalists seemed to have reason on their side. After all, in a multi-ethnic country, Latin was the “lingua franca, a traditional and neutral vehicle,” that was “one of the most cohesive forces,” facilitating communication between groups. Furthermore, as clerical and other delegates from northern Hungary argued, the imposition of the Hungarian language in their region would make communication impossible between the county officials and the population at large.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, if the Hungarian nobles believed that they constituted a “superior race,” assimilation by the ethnic minorities was assumed to be most desirable. If as it was also paradoxically taken for granted that Hungarians were an embattled, anxiety-ridden, and fearful nation, this cried out for assimilation on defensive grounds.

A few delegates were quite self-critical, revealing that a small number of Hungarians wished to brush aside the language question that seemed to defy an easy solution. One delegate admitted that “we ourselves are at fault.” Others, including the personalis, György

69 Ferenc Bíró, “Bevezetés” [Introduction] in Ferenc Bíró (ed.), *Tanulmányok a magyar nyelv ügyének 18. századi történetéből* [Studies in the 18th century history of the Hungarian language] (Budapest, 2005), 8.

70 *Az 1811-iki Országgyűlés jegyzőkönyve*, 335, 350; R.J.W. Evans, “The politics of language and the language of politics; Latin and the vernacular in eighteenth century Hungary” in Hamish Scott and Brendan Smith (eds.), *Cultures of Power in Europe During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), 207; Bíró, “Nyelv, tudományok, nemzet,” 583; *Az 1811-iki Országgyűlés jegyzőkönyve*, 362, 253.

Majláth, expressed moderate arguments in a calm and rational way. It was not Majláth but another anonymous high-ranking official who pleaded with the delegates to proceed slowly with magyarization, a process that, according to this official, should take not ten or twenty years, but whole generations. Doing it violently “would not suit our times.”⁷¹

The personalis himself, describing the country as multi-ethnic, advised that magyarization should proceed “without violence and in amiable and pleasant ways.” He prevailed against delegates from Csanád County, who were demanding that only Hungarians should be promoted in Hungarian regiments. He also managed to veto another demand which would have obligated landowners to hire only Hungarian managers. Majláth cleverly argued that the realization of such a demand would undermine the landowners’ freedom of action, and his argument prevailed. On the other hand, the majority of the delegates insisted—over strong clerical opposition—that Catholic priests, even if they served in German or Slovak villages, should learn to speak Hungarian.⁷²

In light of this dominant trend, which only strong pressure by high-ranking officials somewhat mitigated, it is illusory to magnify the role of those few who swam against the tide. Some individuals did stand for a more just solution, and Endre Arató has listed their names, but their influence was practically nil at the time. Even such a moderate nationalist as Ferenc Kazinczy railed against Gergely Berzeviczy, Count Vince Batthyány and Superintendent Bredeczky, who, according to Kazinczy, wished to fuse Hungary with Austria. Nor was the old Hungarus concept, based on territorial rather than on ethnic loyalty, a viable one any longer. True, the concept was still popular in certain mostly German, Slovak, and Serbian intellectual circles. However, the evidence simply does not support the statement that, just as nationalistic currents were gaining the upper hand at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pursuit of the Hungarus concept remained a realistic alternative.⁷³

Although, at the end, delegates voted for an extraordinary contri-

71 *Az 1811-iki Országgyűlés jegyzőkönyve*, 343, 337.

72 *Ibid.*, 355, 339, 360–1, 363, 365.

73 Endre Arató, “Der Ungarische Nationalismus und die Nichtungarischen Völker (1780–1825),” *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestiensis de Roland Eötvös Nominatae. Sectio Historica* 8 (1966), 93–6; Ferenc Kazinczy to László Vida, April 15, 1812, *Kazinczy* 9: 399; Csáky, “Die Hungarus-Konzeption,” 88.

bution in agricultural produce, this diet failed from the perspective on both sides. Count József Dessewffy was so disgusted that he decided to put an end to his political career, "at least under this dynasty." He concluded his letter to Kazinczy with an emotional outburst that was not borne out by his later distinguished activities, but must have reflected his mood at the time. "It was a misfortune," he wrote to Kazinczy, "to be born in this country, and it is a shame to be a Hungarian."⁷⁴ The king did not convene another diet until 1825 and governed Hungary in a nearly absolutistic manner. Although the autonomy of some Hungarian counties was suspended in the early 1820s, it was not abolished.

Conservative historians have hailed these diets as self-governing organs that, for all their obvious flaws, safeguarded the nation's rights, assured continuity, and led in time to genuine parity with Austria after 1867.⁷⁵ A contrary argument could claim that, in fact, these diets further poisoned Austro-Hungarian relations and imprinted mutual suspicions even deeper into the fabric of both polities. For example, Prince Clemens Lothar von Metternich, the Monarchy's foreign minister, contemplated the abrogation of Hungarian separatism in December, 1811. He was dissuaded from attempting to do so by Napoleon, then Austria's ally, because the emperor did not wish to risk, on the eve of his planned campaign against Russia, an upheaval in his army's rear.⁷⁶

The publication of two books, one by Anton Wilhelm Gustermann, a censor in Vienna, and Michael Piringer, a court official, further poisoned relations between the court and the Hungarian estates. Both books took a stand in defense of royal absolutism against noble privileges and the whole edifice of Hungarian constitutional laws. The outcry at the diet was predictable. The personalis tried to calm passions by reminding the delegates that, rather than indulging themselves in such epithets as "*malevolentia*" and "*morum corruptores*," the better way to counter accusations would be to engage in a debate and refute the opinions of the two writers. The delegates, in no mood to listen to this advice, demanded that the two authors should be punished, although how this should be done was unclear. To counter the possible argument that punishment would be a violation of freedom of expression, one

74 Count József Dessewffy to Kazinczy, June 28, 1812, *Kazinczy* 9: 524.

75 Wertheimer, *Az 1811/12-iki magyar országgyűlés*, 208.

76 Erzsébet Andics, *Metternich und die Frage Ungarns* (Budapest, 1973), 19–25.

delegate reminded his colleagues that such freedom had not protected writings that attacked “good morality and religion” in the past, for example, in 1764.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding all the frequent disappointments and setbacks, the episodic sense of failure, and despite the retrogression in 1811 and 1812, these diets were important from the viewpoint of Hungarian development. For all their undeniably dominant traditionalism, based still on a sense of continuity and permanence, these diets also served as the means of transformation, characterized by the slow accumulation of common sense arguments. Even if these were often neutralized by the conservative majority, they did prepare the way for the eventual acceptance of liberal ideas and practices. A multiplicity of cultural possibilities should also be considered. Old traditions, including the sense of permanence, classicism, the Baroque, and sentimentalism survived, and a new one, the Biedermeyer, emerged. Their existence, side by side, contributed both to a sense of continuity and to a subtle shift in cultural sensibilities.

THE BIEDERMEYER

This concept, originally formulated in the 1850s and aimed ironically against stale philistinism, has had a large literature because it reflected experiences under diverse historical circumstances. Nevertheless, the focus was on emotions, on human intimacy, on the pursuit of small pleasures within homes, and in theaters, clubs, associations, along with family members and good friends, in order to delight and to entertain, rather than to whip up passions, as romanticism was bound to do. Such emotions were connected to earlier precedents, yet they flourished especially between 1815 and 1848. An emphasis on sentiments, sentimentalism, has been firmly rooted in human experience. As Béla Zolnai pointed out, Ancient Greek authors, such as Anakreon and Homer, provided ample examples to the joy of their readers, as did authors in the eighteenth century, when the heroic values of the baroque court were deflated, and when the whole of the human psyche, mind and heart alike, was appreciated by many as integral parts of the “modern individual.”

77 *Az 1811-iki Országgyűlés jegyzőkönyve*, 282, 283, 284, 286.

In fact, the very idea of intimacy had its roots in the eighteenth century. Prior to that time, practical necessity and tradition bound people together “in a highly stratified social world,” where “privacy [was] in short supply and little valued.” It was in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the modern individual was discovered as a feeling, sentimental being, standing often alone but more frequently as part of a loving family or of an equally nurturing association.⁷⁸ No separation was contemplated between the mental and emotional aspects of individuals by the bulk of the reading public, a proposition sanctioned by a popular moralizing literature, as well as such serious tomes as Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Rousseau’s *Nouvelle Héloïse*, and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* were best-sellers, welcomed enthusiastically by mostly female readers, as was Kármán’s *Fanni hagyományai* in Hungary.⁷⁹ This trend was connected to classicism, because both involved, in their essence, a search for harmony. Although certain sentiments in literature could be turbulent and tragic—Goethe’s *Werther* comes to mind—the most popular forms of sentimentalism were urban or bucolic idylls, expressions of a soothing kind of escapism from harsh realities. They basically presented alternate forms of reality for both authors and readers at the time.

In Hungary, there was a certain irony in contrasting eighteenth century precedents with the much more extensive flourishing of the Biedermeyer in the first half of the nineteenth century. As was discussed previously, the ferment of the 1780s and early 1790s contained diverse thoughts, some extremely progressive. However, because of traditionalist dominance and the underlying relative underdevelopment of the country, progressive ideas barely scratched the surface and resulted only in minor reforms. Around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Habsburg control, combined with a revitalized

78 Lynn Jamieson, *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies* (Oxford, 1998), 17, 18.

79 Béla Zolnai, *A magyar biedermeier* [The Hungarian Biedermeyer] (Budapest, 1993; originally published earlier, n.d.), 102, 103, 104, 105; Attila Debreczeni, “Az érzékenység eszmetörténeti vonatkozásai a XVIII. század végének magyar irodalmában” [The historical connections of sentimentalism in the Hungarian literature at the 18th century’s end] in Attila Debreczeni (ed.), *Folytonosság vagy fordulat?* [Continuity or change?] (Debrecen, 1956), 56, 64; Frank Baasner, *Der Begriff ‘sensibilität’ im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 1988), 153.

traditionalist resistance to significant changes, cut the promotion of progressive ideas to a minuscule size. Yet, a development of bourgeois mentality accompanied the process of relative enrichment favoring landowners during the Napoleonic wars. Naturally, owners of large estates benefited the most, but so did, to a lesser degree, the *bene possessionati*, many of whom used the economic boom derived from higher prices for their agricultural products to beautify their mansions in an atmosphere of “financial security and tranquility.”⁸⁰

These circumstances were ready-made for a continuation of smug traditionalism, and, thanks to improved financial conditions, also enabled the beneficiaries of that boom to indulge themselves in a biedermeier spirit, which was even more antithetical to the heroic style and extravagance of the Baroque than classicism was. This development brought the mentality of the *bene possessionati* in the countryside closer to that of the burghers in towns, already acclimatized to the pursuit of small domestic pleasures and the calm of the Biedermeyer, even if it was not yet named as such. This offers us an example of economic and social advances racing ahead of political thinking and activity, a salient characteristic in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

Ilona T. Erdélyi aptly characterized the relative confluence of the hitherto quite separate arenas of the burgher and the *bene possessionati* as the world of “judges of county courts (*táblabírók*) and the burghers,” but the Biedermeyer’s appeal was such that it also found resonances in romantic and even in radical democratic poetry. The poem “A merengőhöz” (“To a daydreamer”) by the romantic poet, Mihály Vörösmarty, exemplifies the Biedermeyer sensibility; the poet disparaged “treasure, fame, and ecstasy” in favor of “whatever the heart can hold,” rejecting what may be “in the perhaps prettier but deceitful distance.” According to Antal Szerb, the love songs of the radical democrat Sándor Petőfi belong in the category of Biedermeyer poetry. The Biedermeyer also influenced the fine arts, but more so in the 1830s and 1840s. János Fancsali made a strong case for not restricting the Biedermeyer period in Hungary to the years between 1815 and 1848, as far as its influence on music was concerned. According to him, that

⁸⁰ Kosáry, 215.

⁸¹ Blanning, “Introduction: The end of the old regime” in Blanning (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century Europe 1789–1914*, 3.

influence was being felt throughout the first half of the century, especially in musical societies and choirs.⁸²

One generalization, advanced by Ilona Erdélyi, did not hold true in Hungary. In her opinion, the Biedermeyer was either anti or non-political. This was most likely true for the burghers in towns, whose weight in political matters of the country was negligible. Erdélyi's claim that authority meant "the bureaucrats and the police" (and they obeyed both) did apply to the burghers. However, her claim did not hold up for the *bene possessionati*, whose interest in county and national politics rarely, if ever, waned. After all, the Biedermeyer way of life negated neither their sense of permanence, nor their self-importance and in no way eliminated the determination of the *bene possessionati* to defend their privileged status. Only when a noble insurrection became a reality in 1809 did the love of comfort many of them had come to enjoy clash with their self-image as fierce warriors, the protectors of Hungary's constitutional liberties. Living more comfortably was undoubtedly the principal reason for the decision of many nobles not to go to war and risk their lives, although various excuses often camouflaged their true motives.⁸³

The Biedermeyer broadened the cultural panorama without, at the same time, excluding the other basic aspects of the lives of Hungarian nobles, especially their attachments to a sense of permanence, the Baroque, and classicism. It would be a mistake to suppose that these attributes existed solely in separate mental compartments in people. Just as the yearning for harmony coexisted with incessant litigiousness in many Hungarians, a similar coexistence often took place between the Baroque and the Biedermeyer. There was no more heroic and baroque text than Sándor Kisfaludy's "Appeal to the Hungarian nobility" in 1809. Yet, the very same poet wrote sentimental letters to his wife, pessimistic about his country's fate and admitting in a letter to

82 Ilona T. Erdélyi, "A biedermeier kora – nálunk és Európában" [The Age of the Biedermeyer – in our country and in Europe], *Helikon* 27, nos. 1–2 (1991), 13; Pál Gyulai (ed.), *Vörösmarty lyrai költeményei* [Vörösmarty's lyrical poetry] (Budapest, n.d.), 292–3; Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, 346–9; János Fancsali, "Biedermeier a magyar zenében" [Biedermeyer in Hungarian music], *Helikon* 27, nos. 1–2 (1991), 190–4.

83 Erdélyi, "A biedermeier kora – nálunk és Európában," 10.

her that he was getting tired of soldiering and writing in another that "I can barely wait to get home."⁸⁴

The gentle magic of the Biedermeyer should not obscure the dark sides of that age, including harassments by the secret police, censorship, and many senseless bureaucratic meddlings. If one concentrated on those, domestic bliss was a poor substitute. Eduard Bauernfeld, a close friend of the composer Franz Schubert, looked back on this period later in his life and described it as permeated by "fear of the intellect, absolute stasis, lethargy, stultification."⁸⁵ This apparent contrast between two visions of the period has prompted certain scholars to assume that the mellow urbanity of the Biedermeyer was only an escapist compensation for enduring the harsh mental and political realities of the external world.⁸⁶ This sounded ever more likely by the 1840s, as tensions were mounting because the political system, named after Metternich, remained essentially immobile and increasingly anachronistic at the same time that social and economic changes out of kilter with that system were taking place. At the same time, once the genie of "sentimentalism" was out of the bottle, the continuing, self-contained cultivation of emotions took on a life of its own. Most likely, these two visions alternated or intermingled with one another. In Antal Wéber's judgment, the Biedermeyer, stoked by nostalgia, did not reflect reality, and the idylls were pure fantasies, but this view makes light of the human capacity of imagination and the ability to shape alternate realities. For readers and observers alike, idylls were not necessarily absolute or to be taken literally, but, rather, approximations of what appeared to them to be attainable and desirable in real life, and this did contain its own reality.⁸⁷

84 Sándor Kisfaludy to his wife, July 8, 1809; September 15, 1809; October 28, 1809, *Angyal, Kisfaludy Sándor minden munkái*, 8: 200, 223, 233.

85 Quoted in *Austria Kultur* 9, no. 2 (1999), 18.

86 Dezső Baróti, *Írók, érzelmek, stílusok* [Writers, emotions, styles] (Budapest, 1971), 252; László Tóth, "Német polgárság – magyar biedermeier" [German burghers and Hungarian Biedermeyer], *Magyar Szemle* 41, no. 2 (1941), 138; György Mihály Vajda, "A biedermeier," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 81, no. 3 (1977), 305; Antal Wéber, "A biedermeier-jelenségről" [About the Biedermeyer phenomenon], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 93, nos. 1–2 (1989), 37; Erdélyi, "A biedermeier kora – nálunk és Európában," 6.

87 Wéber, "A biedermeier-jelenségről," 36.

THE MULTIPLICITY OF MOODS

Classicism imparted a serenity of life and a sense of harmony, the Baroque occasional exuberance and the Biedermeyer an appreciation of domestic bliss. Disappointments with politics in general and getting tangled up with Vienna and its authorities in particular led to frustrations. János Poór is undoubtedly correct in documenting those frustrations and is at least partially right in depicting the ensuing general mental disposition in the country as “bad.”⁸⁸ However, in my opinion, this view is somewhat skewed. In the first place, Poór emphasizes what the Hungarian nobility failed to achieve, first and foremost, the Habsburgs’ respect and a genuine partnership with Vienna, but his view neglects the other side of the coin, namely, what this nobility succeeded in preserving, namely, its privileges and its leading role in the counties, whose autonomy was safeguarded in most instances. Secondly, apart from public life, which was indeed often constrained, the same was not necessarily true of the private sphere. There, the obstacles were chiefly economic, including bad roads, poor inns, and undeveloped financial and cultural institutions, but, within those limitations, opportunities were not missing.

The majority of noblemen, traditionalists to the core, undoubtedly did not feel any need to take advantage of these opportunities and lived their lives as they always had, according to their own seemingly timeless standards. Their manner of political speech mirrored their continuing faith in unchanging absolutes. To them, the “ancient constitution” was not their intellectual property, subject to changes, but an unchanging legacy inherited from venerated ancestors that they as descendants were duty-bound to maintain and transmit to their children and grandchildren. In the political parlance of the times, preserving the constitution intact amounted to guaranteeing Hungary’s very existence.⁸⁹

This mentality obviated an urge to deal with weighty literary or philosophical matters. Even such a serious scholar as Lajos Schedius endorsed the reading of lighter and amusing literature, because it

88 Poór, *A kényszerpályák nemzedéke*, 176.

89 József Takács, “Politikai beszédmodok a magyar 19. század elején” [Manners of political speech at the beginning of the Hungarian 19th century], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 102, nos. 5–6 (1998), 672–3.

“awakened feelings and interest in readers and pleased them much more than lectures by serious writers would have.”⁹⁰ Almanacs were ubiquitous, read by anyone who was literate, although they were sources of information rather than amusement. Popular tales, novels and histories satisfied that need, while for poetry the Gyöngyösi cult continued unabated. In the arena of poetry, Ádám Horváth Pálóczi excelled in glorifying “Hungarian virtues,” but the fact that he did not write poetry in the tradition of Gyöngyösi diminished his popularity.

Other poets such as Gvadányi and József Mátyási fared better, because they directly addressed their readers’ craving for blatant flattery. “I can see no better country than Hungary,” wrote Mátyási, “its smoke glitters more than fire lit by other nations.”⁹¹ Another favorite poet was András Bérei Farkas, who apparently set a negative standard for a rhymester. However, his simple stories and uncomplicated style were reassuring and therefore welcomed by a large number of readers. Bérei, eager to sell his books and use the profit for writing new ones, was unique in becoming commercial. He could do this successfully because of the cheap and shabby appearance of his numerous publications.⁹²

Another favorite of traditionalists was András Dugonics, who remained a prolific writer until his death in 1818, although nothing he ever wrote after *Etelka*, first published in 1788, matched the popularity of that epic. His *Római történetek* (“Roman stories”), published in 1800 and dedicated to his grandson, compared Ancient Rome and contemporary France, claiming that both states had declined because, falling prey to the double temptations of “affluence” and the “pursuit of glory,” they had abandoned “virtue” and “poverty.” The result led to regicides and disunity, and, in turn, to the loss of great men, as well as inevitable decadence and ruin.⁹³ Complacency and a languid disposition generally characterized members of this traditionalist group. Only

90 Introduction by Lajos Schedius to René Lesage’s book, entitled the *Sánta ördög* [The lame devil] (Pest, 1803), II.

91 Quoted in Adorján Kulcsár, *Olvasóközönségünk 1800 táján* [Our reading public around 1800] (Budapest, 1943), 32–43, 47, 55.

92 András Bérei Farkas (Szinyei), *Vérrel festett koporsó* [A coffin painted with blood] (Vázt, 1819), 3–32; Éva Knapp, “Egy fantom ‘vándornyomdász’ a XVIII–XIX. század fordulóján: Bérei Farkas András kiadói és terjesztői tevékenysége” [A phantom “wandering printer” at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries: The publishing and distributing activities of András Bérei Farkas], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 119, no. 1 (2003), 1–2; *ibid.*, no. 2 (2003), 1.

when their privileges were threatened did they get aroused. Otherwise, their moods simply depended on how their everyday lives were faring at any given time.

In contrast, a sensitive and intellectually agile minority did take advantage of the limited and often constrained opportunities. These Hungarians were not liberals or even reformers in the conventional political senses of these words. Like the vast majority of their counterparts who had advanced proposals to solve practical problems at the diets within the framework of the existing social, economic, and political system, most members of this minority were traditionalists. Yet, casting complacency aside, they mounted an assault on cultural institutions and practices that, in their minds retarded Hungary's alignment on the side of advanced Western countries. Their major concerns centered around promoting an improved, more updated version of the Hungarian language and also advancing Hungarian literature, criticism, and the theater.

Most members of this group were young provincials who moved to Pest-Buda and then became integral parts of the country's intellectual elite. One of their leaders was István Horvát, who hailed from an impoverished noble family in Fejér County. His capacity for activity was phenomenal. Although he was employed as a tutor by the Ürményi family, he found time to attend the university and also to read, write, visit friends, and attend many parties. "Pest then was small," wrote Mihály Huszty, "and the nimble Horvát dashed around it several times daily. [He and his friends] were in and out of each other's residences, discussing matters and reviewing each other's writings."⁹⁴

This minority faced very heavy odds, but nevertheless, they were frequently playful and merry, having many great parties, singing, dancing and flirting. Horvát's "trinity" was "country, women, and friends."⁹⁵

93 András Dugonics, *Római történetek* [Roman stories] (Pozsony–Pest, 1800), 4–5.

94 Anna Szalai, *Pályakezdő évek Pest-Budán. Horvát István és íróbarátai, 1800–1815* [The beginning years of careers in Pest-Buda: István Horvát and his writer friends between 1800 and 1815] (Budapest, 1990), 16, 91; Mihály Huszty, "A Mindennapi irodalomtörténeti értéke" [The literary value of *Mindennapi*] in Temesi and Szauder (eds.), *Mindennapi*, 29.

95 Temesi and Szauder, *Mindennapi*, 315, 400, 1806; Szalai, *Pályakezdő évek*, 99, 109; Anna Fábri, *Az irodalom magánélete. Irodalmi szalonok és társaskörök Pesten 1779–1848* [The private life of literature: Literary salons and clubs in Pest between 1779 and 1848] (Budapest, 1987), 316.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Although the diets were infused with highly charged political sentiments, they generally centered around concrete issues that were bargaining chips between the court and the noble delegates. István Horvát and his friends were only marginally interested in the proceedings, which they often viewed with critical eyes. "You mentioned the enthusiasm of the delegates," Horvát wrote to János Ferenczy, "but this is like gunpowder, producing flames that turn quickly into smoke. That is a real national flaw in us." Ferenczy's response was even more devastating. "I despair when I see their [the delegates'] fears and wicked machinations," he responded. "There are only a handful who pursue the happy truth... those who showed themselves intrepid at the start of the sessions are already floundering in declining obscurity."⁹⁶ Ferenczy was clearly disgusted by the diminishing courage on the part of the delegates as the sessions rolled on, in contrast to their bravado earlier in the proceedings.

Horvát, like his friends, was a traditionalist. Although he could be critical of Austria, he was a loyal subject to the king. In his diary, he praised Palatine Alexander Leopold of the late eighteenth century whom he mistakenly took to be a friend of Hungarians. He despised the French, whom he called a "rotten nation." He also planned to write a book in defense of Werbőczy and his *Tripartitum*.⁹⁷ Where Horvát passionately parted with the complacent majority was his and his friends' fervent belief in the need for elevating the cultural level in the country and promoting *pallérozás*, a beautiful, old-fashioned Hungarian word that meant "polish, refinement, culture."

This objective transcended ideological differences, just as it had brought traditionalist and enlightened writers and poets together already in the 1770s, 1780s, and early 1790s. By the early nineteenth century, this fusion had faded away. Traditionalist dominance was virtually complete. However, fissures among the traditionalists ran very

96 István Soós (ed.), *Horvát István és Ferenczy János levelezése* [The correspondence of István Horvát and János Ferenczy] (Budapest, 1990), 108, May 9, 1807; 116–7, May 23, 1807.

97 Temesi and Szauder, *Mindennapi*, 249, 93, 1805; István Soós, "Diplomatika és politika (Horvát István kiadatlan Werbőczy könyvének története) [Diplomacy and politics (The story of István Horvát's unpublished book on Werbőczy)], *Levéltári Közlemények* 59, no. 1 (1988), 81–110.

deep, with the complacent majority believing that all was well and what existed was the best of all possible worlds. Members of the minority knew better. Their habits of making comparisons with more advanced countries and also registering the negative perceptions that others had of Hungarians as barbarians prompted them to reject immobility and passivity and make concerted efforts to overcome cultural backwardness. "We need to transform the soul of our nation," wrote Ferenczy to Horvát in 1802. Taking the constitution and the country's social and economic structure for granted, members of this group came to believe that their nation's survival depended on cultural advancement. More precisely, they thought that, without efforts in that direction, "we would never get out of misery," in Horvát's words, meaning that physical survival was perhaps possible, but not survival in a more meaningful spiritual sense. For that to happen, national self-confidence needed to be built up, which would be possible only with advanced language skills in native Hungarian⁹⁸ and a flourishing literature and theater. "We need culture rather than a new constitution," Berzsényi wrote to Kazinczy in 1809.

András Gergely correctly considers this cultural nationalism, though he does not use that phrase, as part of the modernization of the nobility.⁹⁹ This phenomenon was not promoted just by a relatively small intellectual elite, but also by more forward-looking nobles in the counties. Letters by Hont, Bihar, Ugocsa and Baranya to Pest County all endorsed the general outlines of *pallérozás*.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, members of this minority confronted seemingly insurmountable obstacles, which drove them to despair on occasion. "We live in dreadful times," wrote Ferenczy to Horvát in 1802. Even Mihály

98 "We should learn our beautiful language," wrote Pál Beregszászi in 1818, "according to the wise example of other nations, an example that we should follow." *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* 4 (1818), 67.

99 Soós, *Horvát István és Ferenczy János levelezése*, 15, 1802; *ibid.*, 1806; Oszkár Merényi (ed.), *Berzsényi Dániel összes művei* [The collected works of Dániel Berzsényi] (Budapest, 1968), March 12, 1809, 367; András Gergely (ed.), *Egy nemzetet az emberiségnek. Tanulmányok a magyar reformkorról és 1848-ról* [A nation for humanity: Studies on the Age of Reform and 1848] (Budapest, 1987), 12–3.

100 Letters by Hont, Bihar, Ugocsa, and Baranya Counties to Pest County. Pest Megyei Levéltár [The Archive of Pest County] PML PPSVM nemesi közgyűlésének iratai 1806-1-1613, 1806-1-885, 1806-1-1611, 1806-1-1611 [The documents of noble county assemblies].

Vitkovics (Mihailo Vitković) who, as a member of this group, was a man with a famously sunny and happy temperament, complained in a letter to Imre Légrády that “there is no more thankless and perhaps more pernicious preoccupation in our country than literature... Hungarians have become so apathetic and egotistical.”¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly then, the sharpest attacks of this group were aimed at their complacent compatriots, “cowardly souls... stupid people who despise thinking... the executioners of our happiness... a shapeless mass that does not deserve to breathe Hungarian air.” The need to awaken Hungarians from their awful slumber and lethargy was the substance of very frequent exhortations.¹⁰²

Although the main concern of *pallérozás* involved culture in the narrower sense, Horvát at least understood the need for improved economic conditions, and so he brought up the necessity to better agriculture, control rivers, and promote commerce. He clearly believed that all of these things could be accomplished without altering the underlying social and economic structure of Hungary. Nor was he alone in this belief. István Vedres, one of Hungary’s most eminent engineers, envisaged the building of a canal connecting the two major rivers of the country, the Danube and the Tisza. Yet, he was also an archconservative who condemned cultural imports, including foreign languages, literature, music, and dance, which he called poisons that would lead to the nation’s moral ruin.¹⁰³ Gergely, again correctly, considers this kind of modernization illusory,¹⁰⁴ and indeed, it was. Believing that discordant elements could form a harmonious whole was an illusion. Yet this minority, by placing cultural advancement on the agenda, unknowingly prepared the way for substantial changes, because a marginally more cultured and sophisticated nobility was bound to become, in time, more receptive to the eventual acceptance of social and economic reforms.

101 Soós, *Horvát István és Ferenczy János levelezése*, 15, 1802; D. Sztóján Vujicsics (ed.), *Vitkovics Mihály magyar és szerb írásai* [The Hungarian and Serbian writings of Mihály Vitkovics] (Budapest, 1978), 268, May 28, 1820.

102 Soós, *Horvát István és Ferenczy János levelezése*, 99, 115, 163; Temesi and Szauder, *Mindennapi*, 97, 118, 1805.

103 Temesi and Szauder, *Mindennapi*, 96, 136, 1805; István Vedres, *A magyar nemzeti lélekkről egy két szó* [One or two words about the Hungarian national soul] (Pest, 1822), 12–4.

104 Gergely, *Egy nemzetet az emberiségnek*, 12.

Although a few cultural nationalists, András Dugonics and István Horvát, for example, were noted for their occasional outbursts against Hungary's ethnic minorities, cultural nationalism at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was, by and large, devoid of nationalistic intolerance. It was loosely connected to what R.J.W. Evans described as "*Standepatriotismus alten Stils*" ("feudal patriotism of the old kind"). The members of this *natio Hungarica* were indeed socially exclusive, but they did not care about ethnic origins and were therefore tolerant in this regard.¹⁰⁵ Cultural nationalism, while not extinguishing the relatively tolerant traditionalist universe, did damage it upon occasion. Among the activist minority, some Hungarians emphasized Magyar culture to the exclusion of other cultures, which in turn could lead to xenophobia, to the dislike or hatred of the "other." István Horvát exhibited this trait quite openly, castigating Serbs, Slovaks, and Croats. "We are the rulers here," he wrote in his diary, "and not the enslaved foreign riff-raff."¹⁰⁶ He was not a racist, because, should foreigners become Hungarians, he was willing to embrace them. The Serbian poet and lawyer, Mihály Vitkovics, was a good friend of his, and Horvát rightly considered Vitkovics to be a good Hungarian, overlooking his friend's equal commitment to be a good Serb at the same time. Enough of the old, relatively tolerant atmosphere survived that the dislike of non-Hungarians was by no means ubiquitous yet.¹⁰⁷ Still, many delegates to the diets would have agreed with Horvát, and pressure for "magyarization" in several countries was already appearing. For instance, in 1808, the county assembly of Tolna County decided that

105 R.J.W. Evans, "Der ungarische Nationalismus im internationalen Vergleich" in Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Jorn Leopold (eds.), *Nationalismen in Europa. West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2001), 292.

106 Quoted in Szalai, *Pályakezdő évek*, 20.

107 The statistician Pál Magda could provide an example for that. In his book's introduction, Magda wrote the following: "I hate from my gut the proud nationalism that breaks Hungary apart. The whole world knows that many nations are in this country... and try to maintain the walls separating them as if they were not parts of the same body... To me everybody is a Magyar who had participated in defense of the country whether they spoke German or Slovak... and they bequeathed the glory of the Hungarian nation to their German and Slovak-speaking grandchildren." *Magyarországnak és a határőrző katonaság vidékeinek legújabb statisztikai és geográfiai leírása* [The statistical and geographical description of Hungary and of the military frontiers] (Pest, 1819), XV–XVI.

all communities in the county should employ only Hungarian-speaking village notaries and that all of the communities with German names should take up Hungarian ones.¹⁰⁸

Books on nationalism number in the thousands, and to do justice to all or most of them would leave the reader of this chapter bewildered. Rather, one has to choose what appears to be the most relevant in this case. Miroslav Hroch believed that “the nation-forming process is a distinctively older phenomenon than the modern nation and nationalism.” According to him, this process unfolded in the stages of “substitution, participation, and self-determination.” During the “substitution” phase, “linguistic and cultural demands substituted for the political program where political oppression did not allow for other forms of political activity.”¹⁰⁹ Although oppression is perhaps too harsh a word for what had transpired in Hungary in the 1800s and 1810s, sufficient reasons to refrain from consistently defying the Habsburgs certainly existed, so that promoting linguistic and cultural demands as substitutes made eminent sense. This point has been the consensus of several older and more contemporary historians of Hungary.¹¹⁰

The roots of this cultural nationalism go back to the late eighteenth century, and, first and foremost, to the desire to catch up with the more advanced nations of the west. This desire was reinforced in the first two decades of the nineteenth century by studying foreign models, especially reading foreign authors, such as Herder, who extolled the value of native cultures as primary determinants of nationalist developments.

108 József Glosz, *Tolna megye nemzetiségi politikája a reformkorban* [The nationality policies of Tolna County in the Age of Reform], *Dunatáj* 10, no. 1 (1987), 18.

109 Miroslav Hroch, *In the National Interest: Demands and Goals of European Movements of the Nineteenth Century. A Comparative Perspective* (Prague, 1996), 70, 70–3, 109, 110.

110 János Kósa, *A magyar nacionalizmus kialakulása* [The development of Hungarian nationalism] (Budapest, 1937), 4; István Soós and János Póto (eds.), *Szekfű Gyula. Rövid magyar történet 1606–1939* [Gyula Szekfű: Brief Hungarian history 1606–1939] (Budapest, 2002; originally a manuscript that was written by Szekfű between 1936 or 1937 and 1940); László Péter, “Language, the constitution, and the past in Hungarian nationalism” in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (eds.), *The Habsburg Legacy: National Identity in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh, 1994), 16; Kosáry, 217–8; George Barany, “The age of royal absolutism, 1790–1848” in Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák, and Tibor Frank (eds.), *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington, 1990), 182–4; Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem,” 176.

The reaction to the Napoleonic wars also played a role. Even if Hungary were less affected by these wars than much of Germany, the triumphs of the French armies, motivated by the pursuit of national *gloire*, the humiliations suffered at their hands, and the ensuing resentment activated latent or recently awakened national sentiments. Cultural nationalism rendered Habsburg–Hungarian relations even more difficult, because “the advance of the Magyar language and culture sharpened the distinctiveness of the dominant element in Hungary *vis-à-vis* the rest of the Monarchy.”¹¹¹

Another nail, still very small at the time, had simultaneously begun to pierce the hierarchical, traditionalist edifice, namely, an occasional opening towards the huge reservoir of ethnic Hungarians who were still serfs. The later liberal nationalist idea that propagated the identity of interests among all social classes of the nation was not yet present, but a few in the upper classes did recognize that the abject misery of most serfs was unjust. The selective economic prosperity that benefited the Hungarian countryside during the Napoleonic wars did not, by and large, penetrate into the peasantry, whose lot deteriorated even further once the economic upswing was over. The sole voice raised in genuine concern for the serfs at a diet was uttered by Pál Felsőbüki Nagy in 1807, and he was hooted down by hostile delegates.

As if to demonstrate that culture, in this case, literature, could do more in this regard than politics, folksongs were being collected, starting in the late eighteenth century, and continued with much vigor by the journalist, István Kultsár, starting in 1817.¹¹² Mihály Fazekas, botanist and poet, wrote in 1804 the brief epic poem, *Lúdas Matyi* (“Matyi who deals with geese”), which was published only in 1815. Instantly successful among the peasantry it went through several cheap editions that even peasants could afford to buy.¹¹³ The reasons for its success were clear. The protagonist, the young peasant boy, Matyi, suffer-

111 Evans, “The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem,” 177.

112 János Horváth, *A magyar irodalmi népiesség Faludtól Petőfiig* [The Hungarian literary popular tendency from Faludi through Petőfi] (Budapest, 1978), 92–111.

113 Relatively few data on the peasants’ literacy exist. István György Tóth has done research in this area. According to him, in Vas County, in the first half of the nineteenth century, in 58 villages, 5.5% of the peasants could read and write. István György Tóth, *Mivelhogy magad írást nem tudsz. Az írás térhódítása a kora újkori Magyarországon* [Since you cannot write: The spread of literacy in early modern Hungary] (Budapest, 1969), 67.

ed unjust beatings by men in the service of a landowner. He swore vengeance, and, with a great deal of cunning, succeeded in meting out the same punishment to the landowner himself, not once but three times. This was clearly a case when justice triumphed over seigniorial tyranny. Although Fazekas had been an adherent of enlightened ideas during his college years in his native Debrecen, by the early nineteenth century, he had become a respected member of its establishment.

Two literary historians, László Négyesy and Antal Szerb, far apart in time, agreed that Fazekas' intentions and purposefulness were simply a case of registering moral outrage over injustice, rather than supporting any kind of democratic politics. To Szerb, the very fact that something like this could be published without provoking the charge of high treason against the landowner class was in itself remarkable.¹¹⁴ Count József Dessewffy, a landowner himself, expressed similar outrage after he engaged a serf in conversation, who had bitterly complained about his multiple hardships. Dessewffy tried to steer a middle course between two extremes, one holding the belief that serfs in Hungary were treated like chattel and the other deriving from the *extra Hungariam non est vita* mentality with its blind optimism about the status quo. Dessewffy, in fact, denied the validity of both.¹¹⁵ Neither Fazekas nor Dessewffy would have suggested rights for the serfs, much less their emancipation, but they did advocate more humane treatment of serfs by their superiors, another indication that ideas for changes in the 1800s and 1810s stemmed from philanthropic and patriarchal motives, rather than any kind of liberal ideology. As in the cases of practical solutions offered at the diets and manifestations of cultural nationalism, these small openings toward the peasantry, while by no means denoting a commitment to political equality, were nevertheless preparing the way for its eventual acceptance by a growing number of noblemen.

Already in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, several campaigns to elevate Hungary culturally, at least to approximate west-

114 Négyesy (ed.), *Gróf Gvadányi József és Fazekas Mihály*, 233; Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, 255; János Horváth went a step further, claiming that *Lúdas Matyi* did already conceal some "political seeds." János Horváth, *A magyar irodalom fejlődéstörténete* [The progress of Hungarian literature] (Budapest, 1976; originally written in the early 1920s), 315.

115 Count József Dessewffy, *Bártfai levelek Döbrentei Gáborhoz Erdélyben 1817-ben* [Letters from Bártfa to Gábor Döbrentei in Transylvania in 1817] (Sárospatak, 1818), 158–61.

ern standards, were mounted, according to the precepts of cultural nationalism. Count Ferenc Széchenyi donated, in 1802, his own collections to the nation, part of which became known as the Széchenyi Library. He then became active in distributing its catalogues, not only in Hungary itself, mostly in Pest-Buda, but also abroad, especially in Vienna. His motive was clear; he wanted to prove and document that Hungary, too, was an integral part of European culture. Count György Festetics was another patriotic aristocrat, best known for founding, in 1797, an agricultural school, the Georgikon, which educated farm managers. He also supported cultural efforts, among them József Kármán's *Uránia*. In 1817, he organized the Helikon festivities on his estate in Keszthely, where he invited eminent members of Hungary's literary elite. It was also in that year that awards of the Marczibányi Foundation were first granted. István Marczibányi was a Catholic jurist who became a court councilor in 1800 and died in 1810. In his will, he left 70,000 forints for fostering Hungarian scholarship and developing the Hungarian language. A committee, whose first president was another aristocrat, Count László Teleki, was to distribute seven hundred forints from the annual interest on the bequest. The official patron of the Foundation was Palatine Joseph himself. Political nationalism was clearly unconnected to any of these endeavors.¹¹⁶

Those aristocrats who had actively participated in various patriotic projects, were, exceptions to the rule. Most of the aristocrats, primarily those from heavily Catholic, western Hungary, remained in Vienna's orbit. The vast majority of them were marked by a certain sophistication in their culture and by their devoted loyalty to the Habsburgs, although they were simultaneously resolved to preserve their privileges. Above all, they were determined not to pay any taxes. At the same time, they did not constitute a homogeneous group. The diaries of Count István Széchenyi, the son of Ferenc, who later became the great reformer, showed, during the first half of the 1820s, a kind of ambivalence most

116 Jenő Berlász, "Hogyan propagálta Széchenyi Ferenc az Országos Könyvtárat?" [How did Ferenc Széchenyi publicize the National Library?], *Az OSZK Évkönyve* 1968–69, 60–1, 64, 65; Dezső Keresztury, "Festetics György és a magyar irodalom" [György Festetics and the Hungarian literature], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 67, no. 5 (1963), 557–65; Orsolya Rákai, "A magyar nyelv ünnepe?" [The festival of the Hungarian Language], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 102, nos. 5–6 (1998), 108–9.

likely characteristic of those among his fellow aristocrats who were sensitive and intellectually alert. On one hand, he played the typical role that was expected from a rich and young aristocrat, as he dined and hunted with his peers, including Habsburg archdukes. On the other hand, although Széchenyi did not yet formulate a program of reform, he, as a young cavalry captain who at the time was stationed in various parts of Hungary, exhibited deep sympathy for the country and its people. He wrote at one point that he had a strong inclination “to teach them, lift them up and educate them,” although he admitted elsewhere that he was also repelled “by their unjust blindness, arrogance and conceit.”¹¹⁷

In fact, Széchenyi's feelings toward his fellow Hungarians were severely critical at this point, resembling the reactions of Austrians who either resided or traveled through Hungary. “Pest looks like a sick young man who is growing without getting better or stronger,” he wrote, adding that “this is a poor country where there is so little culture and so few natural endowments and strength... [and] tremendous conceit with little knowledge and merit.”¹¹⁸ Hungary was taken to be *Regnum Marianum*, Virgin Mary's country, where the Catholic faithful honored St. Stephen, the first canonized Christian king of Hungary. Yet, as Evans reminds us, the Catholic Church as state church “incorporated a broadly cosmopolitan culture.” Most of the prelates, great patrons of arts and libraries, came from the aristocracy. Their speeches at successive diets remarkably refrained from making any religious references. Even after the reign of Joseph II, “Josephism” as a system of government in which churches were subordinated to the government not only survived, but, according to the Catholic historian Antal Meszlényi, became even more unrestrained and intrusive.¹¹⁹

Although in Evans' opinion, an “ultramontane tendency [emerged] after 1800 especially among the clergy... it did not gain a foothold among the more nationally minded public.” Considering the laments by devout priests and prelates, including the papal nuncio at the time, Count Gabriele Severoli, this tendency was rather unevenly distributed even among the clergy. Many prelates and parish priests came to regard

117 Ambrus Oltványi (ed.), *Széchenyi István. Napló* [István Széchenyi's diaries] (Budapest, 1982), 165, 179, 180, 188; hereafter cited as *Széchenyi*.

118 Ibid., 166, 168, 177, 183.

119 Robert J.W. Evans, “Religion and nation in Hungary, 1790–1849” in R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 149; Meszlényi, *A jozefinizmus kora Magyarországon*, 113.

themselves as senior civil servants and ordinary government employees, respectively. State control had gained security for them at a time when the spontaneity and vitality of religious life were gradually losing out. Both discipline and devotion slackened inside monasteries, as well as among the parish priests. The Lutheran János Kis befriended a Catholic priest, who confidentially told him that one should not take all Catholic teachings seriously, because what the Church deemed erroneous should be judged by God alone, although some other Catholic priests did remain contemptuous of Protestants.¹²⁰

According to Severoli, who spent six months in Hungary in 1809, people in towns and especially in Pest-Buda were suffering from “ruined morality,” while those who lived far from towns were managing to preserve their faith.¹²¹

In spite of advances by Protestants in Hungary since the diet of 1790–91, they still felt relatively disadvantaged, primarily because of the hostile and often petty vexations perpetuated by the Vice-Regal Council, named the “scourge of heretics” by the Protestant historian, Mihály Bucsay. In 1799, the Protestants presented the king grievances that filled sixty sheets. Otherwise, the Protestant churches, like the Catholic Church, lost some of their religious zeal. The pursuit of their politics of grievances emphasized secular matters. In addition, they became influenced by German rationalist theology and philosophy.¹²²

Cultural nationalism did blunt denominational frictions, and what was lost in areas of religious zeal could be channeled into the dynamic and multiple activities of secular cultural nationalism. This is exactly what happened to Catholic seminarians both in Pozsony and Pest, who often surpassed lay people in their patriotic enthusiasm.¹²³

120 Evans, “Religion and nation in Hungary,” 151; Meszlényi, *A jozefinizmus Magyarországon*, 214; 217; László Balázs, *A felekezetek egymáshoz való viszonya 1791–1830* [The relationship of denominations to each other 1791–1830] (Budapest, 1935), 27; Somorjai and Zombori, *A katolikus egyház Magyarországon*, 64–5; Kis, *Kis János szuperintendens emlékezései életéből*, 219, 198.

121 Meszlényi, *A jozefinizmus kora Magyarországon*, 178–9.

122 Bucsay, *A protestantizmus története Magyarországon 1521–1945*, 177–9; László Tóth, “A vallásos szellem” [The religious spirit] in *MM* 5: 289.

123 Frigyes Brisits, *A XIX. század első fele* [The first half of the nineteenth century] (Budapest, 1939), 51–6. Several of the Pest seminarians collected money for aiding in the publication of Dániel Berzsenyi’s poems. That was gratefully acknowledged by Kazinczy. Ferenc Kazinczy to Mihály Helmeccy, April 12, 1812, *Kazinczy* 10: 3.

How did cultural nationalism fit into Hungary's diverse cultural panorama? Its xenophobic disruptive impact on previous ethnic harmony, though not yet universal, was one way. Most adherents were traditionalists, and as such they maintained their faith in a sense of permanence, not even beginning to imagine a future without the country's hierarchical structure, noble privileges, and "ancient constitution." Any practical suggestion that may have come from any of them concentrated on ameliorating, rather than fundamentally changing, Hungary's social and economic structure. At the same time, the activist minority propelling cultural nationalism advocated changes in the Hungarian language, literature, with the help of critical reviews, and the theater. In these areas, the majority, objecting to most if not all changes, predictably put up a fierce resistance. The result in Hungary was a further debasement of harmony, the cornerstone of the classical idea. The majority fought against even changes that appeared harmless and inoffensive, perceiving them as openings to more radical and dangerous changes that would undermine the very foundations of their beliefs and lead to Hungary's destruction. Members of the activist minority fought back with equal ferocity. They were also products of the same social and intellectual milieu, except that they were aware that values and customs were in flux and could not participate in denying this fact.

It is possible to level criticism against these arguments and to question the lack of any mention of early liberalism, especially among members of the activist minority. Critics would have a point, because Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* enshrined the concept of liberty, although this was meant to guarantee the liberty of only the nobility, whether the noble in question was rich or poor.¹²⁴ This guarantee was no idle word, because delegates to successive diets had taken it for granted by frequently speaking up against an encroachment of royal power.¹²⁵ Thus, it is possible to argue that both the ultra-conservative majority and the activist minority, by adhering to historical traditions and precedents, became custodians of the country's heritage of liberty. The cultural nationalists, by speaking up, followed in the footsteps of their

124 Magyar Tudós Társaság (ed.), *Werbőczy István Hármaskönyve* [István Werbőczy's *Tripartitum*] (Pest, 1844), 47.

125 *Diéta*, 305; Berenger and Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie 1608–1918*, 47, 94, 101, 105, 124, 183, 186, 219, 222, 274.

ancestors, but they also did open up new areas of inquiry. Elemér Mályusz and Moritz Csáky were both correct in pointing out that a foundation for liberalism was present in Hungary. In order to realize its promise, all that was needed would be an extension of rights to all male inhabitants.¹²⁶

The problem arises when this foundation is confused with something that did not yet exist at that time, that is, a liberal political culture. Ironically and paradoxically, the custodians of the heritage of liberty were truly not liberal activists and participants in a liberal movement for equal rights. The extension of rights to the population at promotion of natural rights, especially after 1811–12, was bolstering the large in Hungary was not yet on the agenda. Indeed, evidence that the case for early liberalism is scant. Werbőczy had kept the two spheres sharply separate, and “the confounding [of] natural and historic rights” became a common occurrence in later centuries.¹²⁷ In Hungary’s case, however, historic rights trumped natural rights every time.

Even a cursory reading of books, articles, and letters during the first two decades of the nineteenth century in Hungary would attest to the fact that the country’s historic rights, as defined and enumerated by Werbőczy, were still emphasized and perceived as axioms that could perhaps be modified, but not truly altered. The ultra-conservative majority and the activist cultural nationalists alike shared this view. That, in turn, made it doubtful whether the latter should be regarded as liberals. After all, the discrepancy between believing in a medieval feudal book of laws and in furthering “the legitimate liberty of the individual” against all obstacles,¹²⁸ was considerable. These two things were, in fact, incompatible.

Language reforms were one of the principal manifestations of cultural nationalism. In Ferenc Kerényi’s opinion, they brought people together who otherwise held different views on the country’s future.¹²⁹

126 Elemér Mályusz, “A reformkor nemzedéke” [The generation of the Age of Reform], *Századok* 57, nos. 1–6 (1923), 27–8; Csáky, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus*, 235–46.

127 Magyar Tudós Társaság, *Werbőczy István Hármaskönyve*, 20–3; Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism, 1776–1988* (London–New York, 1997), 6–7.

128 Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism*, 1.

129 Ferenc Kerényi, *Pest vármegye irodalmi élete (1790–1867)* [The literary life of Pest County (1790–1867)] (Budapest, 2002), 25.

Traditionalists could be and often were in favor of free speech, which came from the historical heritage to which they laid claim and also an increasingly dominant *Zeitgeist*. What could have made, in principle, the traditionalists distinct from the liberals? Most important was the fact that the pursuit of individual freedoms, critical to liberals, was only of secondary interest to traditionalists who preferred corporate rights for their privileged group. Nor did the latter share a concern for the serfs, beyond possibly wanting to improve their lot. Because traditionalists accepted severe limitations on the serfs' freedom, any possible claims for traditionalists to be regarded as liberals make no sense. Nor did the Hungarian political scene encompass, as of yet, various pillars of liberal thinking, including a genuine representation within the framework of a parliamentary system, government by consent of the governed, and ministerial responsibility, either as a reality or as an aspiration. Traditionalists did not reach that objective until 1848, and not all of them did so even then. The traditionalists also lacked what Alan Wolfe called a "liberal temperament," that, by definition, "seeks to include rather than exclude... to welcome rather than reject." Finally, traditionalists in Hungary were missing a certain "liberal ambivalence," part and parcel of the mental baggage of one of the best-known liberal thinkers of the times, Benjamin Constant. He adhered to the underlying principles of the French Revolution, while rejecting its extremism and bloodshed. In Hungary, at this time still, there was nearly complete unanimity, without any ambivalence, in condemning France and what that country stood for.¹³⁰ Yet for all the similarities and overlaps, the urgency that the activist minority felt in advancing its causes, and conversely, the fear of changes that infused the majority, assured the continuation of acrimonious debates. The acknowledged leader of the activist minority, Ferenc Kazinczy, embodied both the urge to blow up bridges connecting the two camps and to keep rebuilding them. In other words, as a man deeply steeped in classical culture, he both disrupted harmony and tried to reconstruct it. Consequently, he oscillated between agonizing pessimism and joyful optimism throughout his long career.

130 Alan Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism* (New York, 2009), 19, 129; Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (Princeton, 1995; originally published in French in 1987), 80, 84.

FERENC KAZINCZY

Kazinczy became a leader for several reasons. One was his encyclopedic knowledge of culture, both Hungarian culture and also German and Austrian culture, for the most part. In addition, he was a prodigious and indefatigable letter writer, who was keen on maintaining intellectual control over a wide variety of friends and acquaintances. He could be quite forceful in doing so. If a friend did not answer him, Kazinczy would become panicky and keep pressuring the person both by writing repeatedly to him and complaining to others, clearly hoping that they would put extra pressure on the individual in question. Although Kazinczy sometimes feigned false modesty, he was in fact very vain. In a letter to Gábor Döbrentei, he was bragging about the praise that his good friend, Count József Dessewffy, had bestowed upon him at the 1811–12 diet.¹³¹ He considered the rather mediocre poet János Kis to be a great one, most likely because Kis was rather shamelessly flattering him.

Yet, his personal relationships were complicated. Certainly, Kazinczy could be very supportive, especially to poets at the start of their careers. For example, he wrote several encouraging letters to the young Ferenc Kölcsey. In one of them, he remarked that “if you do nothing, you are guilty. Please act! There are so few from whom one can expect any action.” In another letter, Kazinczy exhorted Kölcsey in a similar fashion. “We must not stand still. Whoever does not move forward stays behind.”¹³² He could also hate passionately, János Batsányi, for example. However, Kazinczy’s obsession with harmony meant that, in most situations, he flattered even his opponents, although he frequently made negative comments about them to others in his letters.

While cultural matters were his principal concern, Kazinczy’s topics covered a wide range of topics. He was quite open to his correspondents about his aches and pains and about his family, his wife Sophie, and his children whom he adored. He could not have given a more glowing account of his family life than in a letter to János Kis: “It is a beautiful thing, my sweet friend, to be a father, a happy husband, and to create a lovely small world around ourselves.”¹³³ Kazinczy, posses-

131 Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, February 3, 1812, *Kazinczy* 9: 268.

132 Kazinczy to Ferenc Kölcsey, February 25, 1811, *ibid.*, 8: 350; Kazinczy to Kölcsey, January 5, 1812, *ibid.*, 9: 211.

133 Kazinczy to János Kis, December 15, 1817, *ibid.*, 15:397.

sing none of the characteristics of the Baroque, was a prominent advocate of both classical ideals and Biedermeyer sensibilities.

True, Kazinczy was an enthusiastic freemason and an enlightened free-thinker in the 1780s and early 1790s. His involvement in the Martinovics conspiracy had earned him time in jail, but all evidence points to his turning toward moderation and then to becoming a traditionalist in his political views by the first two decades of the nineteenth century. This transformation did not mean that he was denying his old beliefs. "God forbid that the philosophy of Helvetius and Voltaire should reign again," Kazinczy wrote in a letter to János Kis in 1810, "but we should be grateful that they did reign once and that they tore apart the fabric of darkness." As István Fried correctly concluded, Kazinczy did not consider those philosophical ideas timely by 1810.¹³⁴ To call him "a liberal," or even worse, a participant in a "private democratic culture" is based not even on a selective reading of his writings, but on a willful ignorance of his writings altogether. The way that this is maneuvered is to claim that Kazinczy was "the classic case of involuntary concealment."¹³⁵ This phrase implies that Kazinczy remained faithful to his youthful ideals, but that he had to conceal them in his letters.

A careful perusal of these letters demonstrate that Kazinczy was generally frank and open about his opinions. It is true that he had to be concerned, as other contemporaries were, about the possible opening of his letters by the authorities. This could conceivably explain why he would not discuss certain sensitive subjects, but he was under no pressure to write whole paragraphs whose meaning was openly reactionary. For instance, in a 1823 letter to Dessewffy, he was chagrined by the outpouring of liberal sentiments abroad concerning Spain and took the side of the rulers who fought against those in the "Holy Alliance." Kazinczy took pleasure in the declarations of its 1822 Congress of Verona.¹³⁶ At the same time, it is also true that he acknowledged the value that his old ideas had enjoyed in the late eighteenth century, and he did retain a certain nostalgia after the close comradeship that he had experienced as a freemason. He warmly reminisced about a few of his

134 Kazinczy to János Kis, October 15, 1810, *ibid.*, 130; István Fried (ed.), *Utak és tévutak Kelet-Közép-Európa irodalmában. Tanulmányok* [Ways and errors in the literature of Eastern-Central Europe: Studies] (Budapest, 1989), 90.

135 Miskolczy, *A modern magyar demokratikus kultúra "eredeti jellegzetességeiről,"* I, 21, 46; Miskolczy, *A felvilágosodás és a liberalizmus között*, 51.

136 Kazinczy to Count József Dessewffy, February 23, 1823, *Kazinczy* 18: 272.

old “brothers,” such as Czindery and Spisics, but this is a weak and unacceptable basis for arguing that he advocated “liberal” views.¹³⁷

Other examples to this effect abound. In 1805 he praised Napoleon, because “he gave religion and morality to that frivolous people.” Kazinczy followed this up by saying how much better it was to live under a “good monarch rather than in a republic, where one would have had to worry about conflagration and bloodshed by the guillotine.” In another attack on the French Revolution, Kazinczy postulated as “an undeniable truth that irreligion and immorality were inseparably connected, as was the case in the National Convention.” In 1806, he celebrated Hungary’s narrow escape from disaster that would have destroyed “the happy constitution of our country.” Along this line, he approvingly quoted the Prussian ruler, Friedrich William who, according to him, had said that “many countries are unfortunate and poor, but [Hungary] is happy and rich, even without commerce, because it does have a constitution.” Kazinczy disparaged Schiller’s fictional Spanish liberal hero, Marquis De Posa, as no better than an “ambitious man who wanted to die famous.”¹³⁸

Like his good friend, Count Dessewffy, Kazinczy was mindful of the suffering of the serfs, and therefore of flaws in the country’s constitution. He wrote in 1812, that “the love of the country is not always identical to what the Corpus Iuris and Werbőczy had suggested, though it is good to cling to such mainstays.” Kazinczy supported a cautious, incremental approach of not radically changing, but, rather, of slowly improving circumstances. He summarized his political philosophy to István Horvát in the following way: “Happy is [the person] who could stand as he had done [in the past], yet could quietly attend to the repairing of errors.” Kazinczy’s primary emphasis was on promoting culture in the spirit of cultural nationalism. “For God’s sake let us give culture to the people,” he wrote, “and everything will be fine, with opportunities for both commerce and industry flowing from that.”

This was a gesture not of a “democrat,” but, rather, of a well-meaning patriarchal nobleman who, in several letters, insisted that he was

137 Kazinczy to Ádám Horváth, July 3, 1814, *Kazinczy* 11: 447; Kazinczy to István Sárközy, July 27, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 487.

138 Kazinczy to József Szentgyörgyi, March 13, 1805, *ibid.*, 3: 290; Kazinczy to Count József Dessewffy, March 30, 1815, *ibid.*, 12: 473; Kazinczy to Farkas Csérey, January 4, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 11; Kazinczy to Baron Miklós Wesselényi, February 21, 1815, *ibid.*, 12: 399; Kazinczy to Mihály Helmecey, July 6, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 453.

not a *paraszt*, a Hungarian word for peasant that has the less than flattering connotation of being crude and uncivilized. "Between the insensitive stench of aristocracy and the egalité of the sans-culotte stands the truth," he remarked. "If someone would disagree with that, he should marry the daughter of a coachman and will find out what the difference between them is."¹³⁹

It would nevertheless be an incomplete picture to portray Kazinczy as merely another nobleman dispensing condescending patriarchal advice to the people, because he, like other members of the activist minority, was fighting hard against the indolent majority, whose indifference not only to culture but also to the people's plight was obvious to him. Observing his county assembly in action, Kazinczy pointed out that, despite the presence of many good and educated individuals, the tone of the meetings displayed a certain "immaturity and childish petulance... they [the delegates] stretched themselves out [in their seats] with boredom on their faces," adding that "I dread that kind of indolence and boredom." He complained in another letter that "the great mass would not budge, even though they commiserate over staying in the same place." As a warning, he mentioned the example of Pál Almásy, who bragged about not having read any book that was published after he had finished school. "Not all eyes see, even if they are open," Kazinczy commented. He claimed to have discovered the principal problem of his own group; namely, it consisted of isolated individuals who "were building their own fortresses," and the vacuum was being filled by those "[who were] playing cards, [carrying on] wild love affairs, and the insane love of luxury." Asking "why do our language, literature, and theater fail to succeed?" Kazinczy came to the sad conclusion that "the *altus* [what is old] is obstructing them."¹⁴⁰

139 Kazinczy to Miklós Csérey, August 15, 1812, *ibid.*, 10: 68; Kazinczy to István Horvát, January 16, 1811, *ibid.*, 8: 275; Kazinczy to Miklós Csérey, March 2, 1818, *ibid.*, 14: 498; Kazinczy to József Szentgyörgyi, May 18, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 152; Kazinczy to Baron László Prónay, May 12, 1808, *ibid.*, 5: 445.

140 Kazinczy to Baron László Prónay, December 7, 1804, *ibid.*, 3: 234; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, September 7, 1812, *ibid.*, 9: 109; Kazinczy to István Kultsár, July 1, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 5; Kazinczy to Miklós Csérey, July 15, 1811, *ibid.*, 9: 13. Such a message would have resonated with the poet Gergely Édes, who had felt desperately isolated in a village in the Bakony Mountains. "My God," he wrote to Kazinczy, "will I ever get somewhere where real people live? ... I wish I could go to Sárospatak, perhaps I could revive there?" Édes Gergely to Kazinczy, August 18, 1816, *ibid.*, 14: 263.

Kazinczy was committed to living by high ethical standards, formed by his classical education. He believed that “wisdom and immutable order exist in the moral world, just as they function in the physical one.” He summarized those virtues in capital letters as “the Beautiful, the Good, the Truthful, the Love of Country and the Hatred of Wickedness.” Cato in Ancient Rome was one of his heroes. When one of his sons was born, he expressed hope that “Cato’s great spirit would possess the little boy and that Country and Virtue would remain holy for him, just as they did for Cato.” Underlining the connection to Ancient Rome, he named his son Antoninus Sophron Ferenc. Kazinczy also admired the ancient Greeks for packaging even the ugly in beautiful forms. Indeed, he was squeamish about anything unpleasant. When reporting about a murder, he hastened to add that “we should banish these disgusting pictures and discuss matters that cheer up our souls.”¹⁴¹

These moral standards were the sources of both his strength and weakness. They provided the backbone for his courageous stands for intellectual freedom and confessional tolerance and against nationalistic excesses. He had faith in progress along those lines. He believed that a good poet worked for the future and attempted to carry his readers with him, not from behind the ranks in the battle but in its vanguard. He insisted on borrowing the best from foreign models—he called them the “flowers from abroad”—“so we [Hungarians] could march into New Jerusalem like the Savior did and not on the back of a donkey.” When the vicious pamphlet “Mondolat” was published against him and his language reforms, Kazinczy agreed that it should be published, “because even opponents of reform need to learn” [presumably from the debates that followed], “and for that reason we should be patient.” Advocating free speech, he wrote to Berzsenyi that “Whoever appreciates liberty should learn to tolerate intemperance as long as possible.”¹⁴²

Kazinczy, committed Calvinist as he was, hated bigotry of any kind.

141 Kazinczy to Ferenc Puky, March 3, 1803, *ibid.*, 3: 35; Kazinczy to János Kis, n.d., 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 227; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, June 1, 1813, *ibid.*, 9: 389; Kazinczy to Farkas Csérey, September 25, 1806, *ibid.*, 325; Kazinczy to István Sárközy, August 27, 1814, *ibid.*, 12: 56.

142 Kazinczy to Miklós Csérey, January 17, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 29; Kazinczy to Ádám Horváth, April 12, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 172; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, September 25, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 191; Kazinczy to Dániel Berzsenyi, January 10, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 177.

When it came to friendships, he paid no attention whatsoever to the person's denomination. In a rare show of empathy, he expressed his disapproval of the treatment of Jews, whose oppression he strongly condemned. He regarded his marriage to a Catholic as a model of reconciliation and had no qualms about taking his daughter, who was raised Catholic, to a Catholic bishop. There were several Catholic priests among his correspondents, including János Horváth, a canon from Veszprém. In fact, he harshly criticized the dogmatism of his own Calvinists and regarded Debrecen as the symbol of crudeness and lack of civility, a city of "petty sentiments," with people whom he characterized as "disgusting butchers, soap-makers, and puritans who speak like market women." He condemned Calvinist hostility to the arts, depicting Calvinism as an enemy of what was beautiful, with only miserable substitutes in its place. In a letter to Count Dessewffy, Kazinczy reported the concentrated attacks on him by "the army of Calvin," because of his claim that Catholics could also write good Hungarian prose. He especially read with pleasure the writings of Cardinal Pázmány. "Where would we be without him?" Kazinczy asked. Mihály Fazekas was upset by Kazinczy's attacks on his city, Debrecen, and accused Kazinczy of unfair generalizations. In his response to Fazekas, Kazinczy somewhat backtracked, writing less than truthfully that he was not personally attacking anyone, but only certain attitudes of "insufferableness and conceit." He ended his letter to Fazekas by pleading with him to set aside disagreements so "we could love each other and remain good friends." Yet in a letter written to a friend just a month later, he castigated the "nonsense by Fazekas who should be caned." He excused his apparent duplicity by writing to the same friend that, although he was contemptuous of Fazekas, he treated him without ferocity.¹⁴³

As in confessional matters, so in his attitude toward nationality Kazinczy was most broad-minded. In contrast to Ádám Horváth, he

143 Kazinczy to Károly Rumi, September 4, 1812, *ibid.*, 9: 101; Kazinczy to János Tatay, September 14, 1814, *ibid.*, 12: 87; Kazinczy to János Horváth, November 8, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 276; Kazinczy to Gábor Nagy, April 30, 1805, *ibid.*, 3: 321; Kazinczy to József Szentgyörgyi, February 27, 1803, *ibid.*, 3: 27; Kazinczy to János Kis, March 6, 1816, *ibid.*, 14: 22; Kazinczy to Count József Dessewffy, November 26, 1814, *ibid.*, 12: 201; Mihály Fazekas to Kazinczy, September 23, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 321; Kazinczy to Mihály Fazekas, October 8, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 356; Kazinczy to Farkas Csérey, November 15, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 389; Kazinczy to Farkas Csérey, December 21, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 433.

believed that external appearance had nothing to do with genuine patriotic feelings. In a letter to Horváth, he wrote that “while you think that your mustache and top-knot are national, so is my clean-shaven face.” In another letter, he asserted that “in all corporations there are good and bad people. ... I was told that a Romanian did wonderful things during the Hora war.”

István Horvát vehemently objected to Kölcsey’s review of Berzsenyi’s poems, in which Kölcsey had claimed that Magyar folk songs lagged behind Serbian ones. Kazinczy sided with Kölcsey, writing that Horvát was “an hongrais enrage who would not mind to attach to Hungarians even what was untrue, so that we could shine. I do think that I am a passionate Hungarian, but not to the degree of spreading lies.”¹⁴⁴

Kazinczy’s commitment to his ideals had apparently given him strength to stake out positions that he held to be ethically superior without worrying about their popularity. At the same time, holding these lofty ideals proved to be a source of weakness, in fact, a liability. Kazinczy was, after all, not a neutral arbiter, but the unofficial leader and guide of a group in the midst of a vicious atmosphere of discord. For this reason, most of his followers expected him to lead without any compromises, prevarications, or “ifs and buts.” At times he was doing exactly that, but, on other occasions, the combination of his own timidity, his yearning to love and be loved, to be universally admired, and to impose harmony even on what was basically disharmonious led to insoluble contradictions. This became clear in his pursuit of the major battles of the cultural nationalists, for language reforms, for credible literary reviews, and for appropriate newspaper or journal outlets. The only arena to which he brought a light touch was the struggle for the Hungarian theater.

In hindsight, it is hard to believe the ferocity of disagreements over even seemingly trivial grammatical details and over the usage of certain words. The principal reason for all this passion was the fact that improving the Hungarian language was one of the most significant ways in which the activist minority distinguished itself from members of the majority, who regarded language as just another unalterable form of their inheritance from venerated ancestors. Kazinczy was

144 Kazinczy to Ádám Horváth, March 19, 1817, *ibid.*, 14: 505; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, September 5, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 307; Kazinczy to János Kis, May 6, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 175.

totally committed to this struggle, and some of his statements were uncompromising. He mocked his opponents who claimed that Hungarians were an eastern nation. Would they, asked Kazinczy, send an architecture student not to study Rome or Paris, but to sketch hovels by the Don River? Was Hungarian a dead language that should not be changed? Kazinczy frequently referred to the German example. In that case, he asked, “does Goethe, whom I like the best among German writers, write the way Germans wrote 40–50 years ago?” Furthermore, he firmly stated, “German literature reached the apex of its glory after much dreadful discord.” He also claimed that language reform might stumble in practice, but in theory it was as true as mathematics.¹⁴⁵

Yet, for every militant statement Kazinczy made, a counter-example of retreat or equivocation can be found. To his credit, he toned down the extremists in his camp, including Dávid Szabó and Mihály Helmecky, but he responded meekly to the attacks by Miklós Révai. He also refuted his own comparison of language reform to mathematics by explicitly stating that linguistics was not like that at all; rather it resembled a rainbow with many colors. At one point, he advocated forming a synthesis by the merging of the two camps, steering them to the middle.¹⁴⁶

Another bone of contention concerned critical reviews. Constant squabbling was deeply etched into the fabric of Hungarian society, but this was counterbalanced by the classical idea of harmony and by the idea and practice of love, inspired both by Christianity and by the sentimentalism of the period. The unresolved tension between reality and objective was palpable, and Kazinczy most conspicuously embodied that tension. He could be resolute about stressing the significance of

145 Kazinczy to Farkas Csérey, March 31, 1805, *ibid.*, 3: 303; Kazinczy to György Aranka, July 1, 1810, *ibid.*, 8: 3; Kazinczy to János Kis, February 12, 1804, *ibid.*, 3: 159; Kazinczy to Baron József Prónay, December 21, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 363; Kazinczy to József Szentgyörgyi, September 15, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 159.

146 Kazinczy to József Szentgyörgyi, February 24, 1804, *ibid.*, 3: 172; Kazinczy to Mihály Helmecky, April 13, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 341; Miklós Révai to Kazinczy, February 10, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 40; Kazinczy to Miklós Révai, March 15, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 86–7; Kazinczy to Alajos Szentgyörgyi, February 27, 1818, *ibid.*, 14: 520; Kazinczy to Ádám Horváth, April 30, 1817, *ibid.*, 171. His good friend, Count József Dessewffy, agreed with him. “The *neológs* [supporters of language reform] hurry too much, while their opponents are too slow: we should aim at searching out the middle course.” Dessewffy to Kazinczy, June 20, 1819, *ibid.*, 16: 421.

critical reviews. "If we would have reviews, we could be way ahead," he wrote in 1808. Three years later, he was sharply categorical about the need for critical reviews, if they were necessary. "Did not Jesus Christ, though he was God, chase out with a lash those who had defiled his Father's Temple?" he asked. In the same year, he expressed his hope that critical reviews alone would "wake us up from our sleeping sickness and open our eyes, so we can understand ourselves and others and learn the laws of our language." He had summed up the merits of such reviews in a letter written in 1818: "Critical reviews are the best schools for both writers and readers. If they are not reproachful but merely suggestive, then they are useless."¹⁴⁷

Some of his closest friends disagreed, because they became furious over the apparent violation of classical harmony. Pál Szemere, a special favorite of Kazinczy, attacked the concept of critical reviews by writing that "one should not stab or kill anyone... the Hungarian literati are becoming abusive to one another, and I call this cultivated insult." Gábor Döbrentei also objected to the tone of reviews, which, according to him, should be written lovingly, rather than harshly, so that writers would not be frightened away, but could learn from them. Ádám Horváth accused Kölcsey, the author of a savage review on Berzsenyi's poetry, of bringing grist to the mill of malicious Germans in Vienna. He would have dispensed with reviews altogether, replacing them with discreet private letters addressed to the writers themselves.¹⁴⁸

Kazinczy himself was hesitating on occasion, trying to be critical and polite at the same time, "to tell the truth but not to do it by stabbing" or "not to offend or shame anyone." Kölcsey was a much more resolute leader in this respect. "We have to chop and lash" he wrote to Kazinczy, "so to shake up our public from its wretched indolence... the Good shines best when it provokes the Bad." Indeed, he followed his own advice, attacking Csokonai, Berzsenyi and others without any equivocation.

147 Kazinczy to Baron Sándor Prónay, February 26, 1808, *ibid.*, 5: 339; Kazinczy to Dániel Berzsenyi, January 10, 1811, *ibid.*, 8: 256; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, April 21, 1811, *ibid.*, 8: 463; Kazinczy to Ádám Horváth, March 5, 1818, *ibid.*, 15: 521.

148 Pál Szemere to Kazinczy, April 29, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 335; Gábor Döbrentei to Kazinczy, December 27, 1814, *ibid.*, 12: 286; Ádám Horváth to Kazinczy, February 26, 1818, *ibid.*, 14: 486; Ádám Horváth to Kazinczy, April 10, 1818, *ibid.*, 16: 1.

When a loud uproar among the literati ensued, Kazinczy was in a bind. He liked Kölcsey, and part of him approved his young friend's courage, but he was also somewhat taken aback by the harsh tone of Kölcsey's reviews. Characteristically, he tried to please everybody. In a letter to the enraged Berzsenyi, he attempted to calm the poet by saying that "Kölcsey was not rude to you." Then he hedged his bets by writing that he respected Kölcsey's reviews, though not as much as his friends in Pest did, adding that a reviewer could err as well. In this particular case, he wrote, "the grave tone of the review is suspicious."¹⁴⁹

In Hungary at that time, no sharp dividing line between public and private affairs existed. Everything had become instantly personal. Consequently, all the protagonists became offended. Berzsenyi called Kölcsey "impudent," and Kölcsey himself decided to stop writing because of the adverse reactions his reviews had provoked. Kazinczy, although he had hoped to rise above the fray, grew disconsolate because Sándor Kisfaludy reacted negatively to his review. Kant's Hungarian interpreter, István Márton, was incensed that his reviewers were neither philosophers nor theologians. The entire group of literati appeared to be engaging in a collective pout. Although Kazinczy was very much part of this pout himself, he was nevertheless able to take a more sanguine longer view. "We should rejoice over the fact that our writers are quarrelling," he wrote in 1818. "Even if we lose, our cause will win," he then added. "I wish, though, that we would overcome this phase of savagery. If this happened, the crisis will pass."¹⁵⁰

Newspapers and journals were another arena engaging the attention of the activist minority. Their numbers diminished precipitously after 1795, until István Kultsár finally succeeded in starting the publication of the *Hazai Tudósítások* in 1806. The literati welcomed this publication at the beginning, but in time, the discontent with the paper and with Kultsár himself grew by leaps and bounds. Apart from disagreements with Kazinczy on the language reform, this change of heart had to do most likely with the rather low literary standards of the

149 Kazinczy to János Kis, April 29, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 139; Kazinczy to Miklós Révai, August 5, 1806, *ibid.*, 4: 253; Kölcsey to Kazinczy, March 28, 1816, *ibid.*, 14: 85; Kazinczy to Dániel Berzsenyi, October 18, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 341–2.

150 Berzsenyi to Kazinczy, September 8, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 313; Kazinczy to Sámuel Pápay, January 4, 1818, *ibid.*, 14: 415; Kazinczy to Dániel Berzsenyi, June 2, 1814, *ibid.*, 11: 408; Kazinczy to Sámuel Pápay, May 31, 1818, *ibid.*, 16: 50.

paper. Even Ferenc Toldy, who generally praised Kultsár, admitted that he was lacking the talents of a journalist. Yet Kultsár, in his modest way, did contribute a great deal to the development of Hungarian culture, especially in the arenas of literature and the theater.¹⁵¹

The Transylvanian journal *Erdélyi Múzeum*, under the editorship of Gábor Döbrentei, a good friend of Kazinczy, was of higher quality, but adverse economic conditions in Transylvania in the mid-1810s diminished the number of its subscribers. The journal ceased publication in 1818. Its place was taken by the crowning accomplishment of cultural nationalism in Hungary, the journal *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, which started publication in 1817. Its editor was György Fejér, a Catholic priest, whom Anna Fábri has characterized as a person who in part unthinkingly prepared the way for progress in spite of his own traditionalism, a phenomenon so typical of the activist minority in general. Kazinczy was quite antagonistic toward this journal at the beginning. It appears that he disliked any cultural institution that he did not control, but he did come around to supporting it. Kazinczy's duplicity did not evade the attention of his friends in Pest. He rather lamely defended his contradictory positions by claiming that, "one can simultaneously love and hate the *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*... everything has two sides."¹⁵²

Nothing better illustrates the relative lack of interest in economic, social, and political issues on the part of the activist minority than Kazinczy's relationship to Transylvania. As a land even more undeveloped than Hungary proper, it was mired in traditionalism to the point that two of Kazinczy's Transylvanian friends, Farkas Sándor Bölöni and Miklós Cserey, desperately wished to leave for Pest and Vienna, respectively. Although Kazinczy acknowledged in one letter that "in Transylvania [refined] taste is lagging behind," he concentrated on how much he could converse with people in Hungarian. "I was there for three months," he wrote, "and no one, man or woman,

151 Ferenc Toldy, *Irodalmi arcképek* [Literary portraits] (Budapest, 1985; originally published in 1856), 107–13; György Kókay, "Kultsár István, a pesti újságírás meghonosítója" [István Kultsár, the realizer of journalism in Pest] in Kókay, *Felvilágosodás, kereszténység, nemzeti kultúra*, 178–82.

152 Fábri, *Az irodalom magánélete*, 236; Kazinczy to János Kis, March 1, 1818, *Kazinczy* 14: 493; Kazinczy to János Szabó, November 13, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 353; Kazinczy to Mihály Helmecky, February 17, 1819, *ibid.*, 16: 301.

spoke to me in any other language than Hungarian... they are much less spoiled than we are.”¹⁵³

The subsequent Age of Reform in Hungary was prepared not by precursors of liberalism, but by the struggle between two camps of traditionalists. Those in the activist minority worked primarily for cultural changes. Along with delegates to the diets who proposed practical solutions to specific problems, they inadvertently were shifting cultural and intellectual assumptions. Practical suggestions at the diets were bound, in time, to lead to the questioning of fundamental principles. While the debates over critical reviews seemed to have reached an impasse, the practice of critical thinking was becoming frequent and familiar. This led, in time, to eventual challenges in the hierarchical social structure of the country.

153 Sándor Bölöni Farkas to Kazinczy, September 26, 1816, *ibid.*, 14: 295; Miklós Cserey to Kazinczy, March 15, 1818, *ibid.*, 15: 525; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, November 30, 1815, *ibid.*, 13: 305; Kazinczy to László Vida, May 29, 1817, *ibid.*, 15: 214.

CHAPTER 5

The Ambiguous Journey Toward Reforms

THE HUNGARIAN THEATER, MUSIC, AND THE ARTS

On September 28, 1820, in Pest, the king happened to attend the performance of the young playwright, Károly Kisfaludy, entitled *A tatárok Magyarországon* (The Mongols in Hungary). This play was remarkable for its patriotic fervor, and so was this particular performance, because the king himself showed up in full Hungarian national costume, a minor but, to the Hungarian contemporaries, most pleasing gesture.¹ The king's presence was significant for two reasons. In the first place, it demonstrated that the Hungarian theater, while still lagging behind the quality of its German counterpart, also in Pest, had succeeded in becoming presentable after a protracted struggle. Secondly, the patriotic fervor displayed in the play was another manifestation of cultural nationalism without any political overtones and therefore inoffensive to royal ears.

Even Kisfaludy's biographer, who was favorably inclined to him, admitted that, notwithstanding the play's intense patriotic content, its artistic value was low, a fact that Kisfaludy himself acknowledged in an epigram composed in 1828, writing that the play was "a patriotic rant... dreadful in its Hungarianism."² However, at the time of its first performances, the play was a rousing success, enthusiastically received by the audience, who clearly liked the principal message of the play, namely, that even the Mongol enemy appreciated Hungarian heroism. As in other instances of remembering a national calamity, defeat by the enemy was turned into a triumph. The struggling young playwright, who was also a painter, became a national sensation overnight, thanks to favorable reviews in the newspapers. "Our nation can rejoice,"

1 Ferenc Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet, 1790–1873* [The history of Hungarian theater 1790–1873] (Budapest, 1990), 151.

2 Quoted in József Bánóczy, *Kisfaludy Károly és munkái* [The works of Károly Kisfaludy], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1882), 1: 210; Ferenc Schédel (ed.), *Kisfaludy Károly minden munkái* [The collected works of Károly Kisfaludy], 5 volumes (Pest, 1843), 1: 135.

István Kultsár wrote in the *Hazai Tudósítások*, “and can hope that finally the national Hungarian theater is going to gain ground.”³

Indeed, the long fight for the Hungarian theater had reached its major objective, a nearly universal acceptance. Rather than to rehash the history of the Hungarian theater with its ups and downs, it is more important to place this story in the context of cultural nationalism. The evolution of plays in Hungarian—their variety, content, the emotional and at times passionate connection between these plays and their audiences—had finally become an integral part of that brand of nationalism.

The roots of theater in Hungary were thoroughly respectable when plays were performed either in religious schools or in aristocratic mansions. The Jesuits placed great emphasis on theater in their schools and preferred plays with a didactic and usually religious message. The piarists, on the other hand, reflecting their somewhat more eclectic interests, had taken account of what the audiences desired. This was true to some extent in Calvinist schools as well, but in all of them plays had to conform to the religious world view to which all Christian denominations adhered in their differing ways.⁴ The other significant base of theater life in Hungary was the aristocracy. Following the French example, the Esterházy, the Pálffy, the Grassalkovich, the Erdődy, and the Károlyi families, among others, organized festive theatrical performances in their respective castles.⁵

These kinds of theater were seemingly exempt from any possible moralistic attack, but, as Sándor Báróczi, the writer and onetime life-guard in Vienna, recognized, particular plays could be read in different ways. While in Vienna, Báróczi was exposed to a secular and sophisticated world of theater, and he noted that the impressions that plays made on audiences could work in contradictory ways. He wrote that “the theater is the kind of flower from which spiders may suck poison, while bees gather honey from it. I personally can say that I always left the theater more satisfied than when I entered it.” Báróczi also argued that theaters could bring additional advantages to Hungary by enhancing “the cultivation of language and the popularity of literature.”⁶

3 Quoted in Bánóczi, *Kisfaludy Károly és munkái*, 1: 231.

4 Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet*, 21–7; Erzsébet Hanskarl, *Budapest irodalmi életének kialakulása, 1686–1780* [The evolution of the literary life in Budapest 1686–1780] (Budapest, 1928), 26–8.

5 Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet*, 28–34.

6 Báróczi, *A védelmezett magyar nyelv*, 71, 295.

Two Transylvanians, the theater-manager and actor, János Kótsi Patkó, and the aristocrat, Count László Teleki, expressed similar sentiments. Kótsi declared that “nothing is better to mould the heart and to improve upon a nation’s character than the theater, but it is up to the understanding by the actor whether the play in question would project immorality or uplift morality.” Many enemies of the theater, to paraphrase Teleki, claimed that, for all the good that would derive from cultivating the Hungarian language in plays, the weakening of morality would cause greater harm. Weighing those two factors, Teleki concluded that “even the best things can be abused, and just because there are people who do that, I would not deny their usefulness.”⁷

To posit a division between obstinate traditionalists and more dynamic cultural nationalists on this issue would be too simplistic, because, as Ferenc Kerényi pointed out, support for the theater came from groups and individuals who otherwise represented contrary views. For instance, András Dugonics and Sándor Kisfaludy, both of them staunch conservatives, did support the theater. Most likely, they would have agreed with a young nobleman from Szatmár County, János Ötvös, whose speech Kazinczy quoted approvingly. Ötvös set aside questions of morality and religion and supported the theater for only one principal reason, that is, for promoting *pallérozás*. Ötvös asked, “Should we be without that? Should we end up losing, would it not be better to lose as Hungarians, rather than as Germans?”⁸

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the conventional division still held to a degree, the key line of demarcation lay between those who fully and those who at least partially internalized the new individualistic ethos of the times and recognized that they as spectators had within their power to choose between what was moral and what was not on the stage. The enemies of the theater were, by and large, moral absolutists who had no faith in what they saw as the feeble judgment of individuals and wanted to enforce what they considered the only just and correct morality through censorship or outright proscription.

Indeed, although the government through its censorship office allowed the performance of plays even if the censor did not think much

7 János Kótsi Patkó, *A régi és az új theatrom históriája és egyéb írások* [The history of the old and the new theater and other writings] (Bucharest, 1973), 135; Teleki, *A magyar nyelv előmozdításának buzgó esdeklései*, 204, 205.

8 Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet*, 259; Kazinczy to István Sárközy, March 30, 1816, *Kazinczy* 14: 92.

of the play's quality, the recommendation in other instances was an outright ban. For example, in a letter to the Vice-Regal Council, Frigyes Drescher, a censor, strongly recommended banning a historical drama by János Homonnai on the grounds that "the play lacked both moral values and artistic beauty." This kind of moralistic attitude was by no means unique to Hungary. In the young United States, the Continental Congress of the 1780s passed a resolution that included "gambling, horse-racing, cock-fighting and all shows and plays," under the rubric of "extravagance and dissipation." Prejudices that derived from certain moralistic attitudes were deeply entrenched in certain segments of the nobility in Eastern and Central Europe. Consequently, actors lacked social approval, and their conditions of existence did remain precarious.⁹

The debates about the Hungarian theater were conducted in several forums, including the press, the county assemblies and some of the diets. The latter example proves the national significance of these debates, demonstrating that advocates and opponents alike realized that the theater was too important to be marginalized or treated simply as a matter of private amusement. At the 1808 diet, Judge József Szilassy asserted that the theater, of Asian origins, signals decadence and claimed that those nations which bring theater into fashion perish. The chorus of objections to this view was shrill. In the opinions of several delegates, theater was not only a means of *pallérozás* for all nations, but also a means of elevating morality. These delegates found it incomprehensible that, among all the nations, Hungarians should lack a national theater and be forced to amuse themselves in a foreign tongue in their very own country. This statement hinted at the preponderance of German-language theaters in Hungary, which was no surprise, because majorities in most towns were German-speaking officials, merchants, and artisans who had the means for and interest in supporting theatrical performances. Although quality was frequently sacrificed to commercial success and cheap popularity, the

9 Frigyes Drescher to the Vice-Regal Council, April 19, 1827, Edit Mályuszné Császár (ed.), *Megbíráltak és bírálók. A cenzúrahivatal aktáiból (1780–1867)* [The censored and the censors: From the documents of the Censorship Office (1780–1867)] (Budapest, 1985), 542–3; Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York, 2000), 406; István Fried, "A magyar színházi mozgalom kezdetei (kelet-közép európai kontextusban)" [The beginning of Hungarian theater in the context of East-Central Europe], *Színházstudományi Szemle* 28 (1991), 6.

level of performances and professionalism were generally higher in the German than in the Hungarian theaters. The former had better professional musicians, and, in Jolán Kádár's opinion, music often overwhelmed prose on the stage. After all, the long list of weak playwrights could not really compete with Mozart, Rossini, or Beethoven.¹⁰

Most plays were sentimental in the extreme, written by August von Kotzebue and his epigones; others were about military heroes. Certainly, Schiller and Shakespeare made an impact, but, as Péter Dávidházi pointed out, "Shakespeare was praised in Hungary before he became truly studied." His plays were abridged and revised in the German theaters, and the struggling Hungarian theaters could at most play a single act or even less, together with other mostly mediocre dramas that held out promises of financial gain.¹¹

The Hungarian theater was even more vehemently discussed at the 1811–12 diet, as the delegates were thrown on the defensive on a whole host of issues. The arguments remained the same, with the Personalis repeating the old accusation that theatrical performances were symptoms of decadence, a proposition strongly denied by others. János Vitéz, a delegate from Abaúj County, claimed that having a Hungarian theater made no sense since Hungarians had no talent for it, a variant on the frequently advanced retrograde view that plays amounted to nothing but histrionics, unworthy of Hungarians. In a new turn of events, voices demanding the termination of the German theater in Pest were raised. A delegate from Pest County had to remind his colleagues that such an action would in fact make the case for a Hungarian theater even more difficult, because "the Hungarian theater needs an example that shows how it can perfect itself."¹²

The battle continued. Pál Szemere and Endre Horvát Pázmándi

10 *Naponként való jegyzései az 1808-dik esztendőben*, 322–3; Jolán Kádár, *A pesti és budai német színház története, 1812–1847* [The history of the German theater in Pest and Buda 1812–1847] (Budapest, 1923), 8. "Delusive musical pieces stemming from an unhealthy imagination," wrote András Fáy, "tyrannize the scene... [instead of] educating [the audience] to learn from the examples of the past, to making an impact on hearts in order to emphasize noble deeds." *Felső Magyarországi Minerva* (December, 1825), 492.

11 Péter Dávidházi, "Egy irodalmi kultusz meghonosítása. Beavatás a Shakespeare-kultuszba a XVIII. század végén" [The introduction of a literary cult: Initiation into the Shakespeare-cult in the late 18th century], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 91–2, nos. 1–2 (1997–8), 46–7.

12 *Az 1811-diki Országgyűlés jegyzőkönyve*, 384–7; *Iratok*, 82.

wrote poems urging their compatriots to support the Hungarian theater. In 1810, the former stressed that plays could educate their audiences in good morality, and in 1815, the latter tried to convince Hungarians to value their heart and patriotism more than externals, such as national costumes, implying that cultivation of the former would naturally lead to support for the Hungarian theater. Indeed, in 1819, István Kulcsár urged Hungarian playwrights to pick their subject matter from the country's past history in order to demonstrate "the sparkling of the national soul," to teach the love of the constitution and old customs, and to promote the Hungarian language.¹³

The enthusiastic reception of Károly Kisfaludy's play proved that audiences endorsed such a program. Count József Desseffy was critical of the low artistic level of performances in Miskolc, but he had to admit that the theater was always full, because "the patriots do not tolerate deficiencies."¹⁴ The triad of indiscriminate enthusiasm by the spectators, mostly weak plays, and uneven acting characterized Hungarian theatre during this early phase. Nevertheless, *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, the principal organ of cultural nationalism, championed the cause, and several of its articles were dedicated to promoting the Hungarian theater. In a most sobering and pessimistic article, the playwright József Katona enumerated the obstacles that the Hungarian theater was confronting. Its very absence was one, because the combination of prejudices against it and the lack of financial support made it a scarce phenomenon. Another obstacle was national boasting, because it ignored quality as long as the nation was being praised on the stage. Printers were reluctant to publish plays, and censorship was debilitating, as was the lack of constructive reviews.¹⁵

13 Andor Solt, *Dramaturgiai irodalmunk kezdetei, 1772–1826* [The beginnings of Hungarian dramaturgy 1772–1826] (Budapest, 1970), 96–7, 101; quoted in Katalin Varga S. (ed.), *Hazai tudósítások* [News from home] (Budapest, 1985), 242–3.

14 Desseffy to Kazinczy, May 13, 1817, *Kazinczy* 15: 194–5.

15 József Katona, "Mi az oka, hogy Magyarországban a játékszíni költőmesterség lábra nem tud kapni?" [What is the reason in Hungary that the writing of plays cannot get off the ground?], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* IV (1821), 3–22. "Our bishop," wrote Jakab Klivényi to Mihály Vörösmarty, "is a sworn enemy to all plays, and he considers those who like and promote them as depraved individuals... there are many who think that the theater is the work of the devil." Klivényi to Vörösmarty, April 18, 1822, Ferenc Kerényi (ed.), *Magyar levelestár. A vándorszínészettől a nemzeti színházig* [Hungarian correspondence: From touring companies to the national theater] (Budapest, 1987), 128.

Sámuel Kovács was more hopeful, because he placed the question in a comparative historical perspective. He pointed out that the German stages had also been inundated with translations and weak plays before they had managed to reach their current high level of performances. He then suggested that the Hungarian theater could possibly follow the same trajectory. This article was published in 1825, the very same year when a Catholic parish priest, András Horváth, made a passionate appeal to his fellow Hungarians not to waste more time in establishing a Hungarian theater in Pest, which was the obvious location for one. He compared the theater to a tree that should be nourished. "Every big thing has a small beginning," he wrote.¹⁶

The passing of time worked in favor of the Hungarian theater. Although progress was uneven and by no means rapid, the combination of enjoyment at attending theater performances, generous sacrifices by individuals and a few counties, the knowledge that failing to develop theaters would make Hungary fall even further behind other nations in the all-important cultural sphere, and, last but not least, an ever stronger sense of patriotism propelled the cause of the Hungarian theater. A liberal ideological meaning behind this endeavor was truly not discernible. After all, Hungarians of differing views considered themselves to be patriots, including the Kisfaludy brothers, who had dominated the Hungarian theater in the 1820s. Even Károly, at the beginning of the decade, was a dedicated conservative.¹⁷

Not surprisingly therefore, debates on the Hungarian theater at the 1825–27 diet lacked the passion that had characterized earlier diets. István Máriássy, a delegate from Gömör County, repeated some of the old arguments, such as how great a role the theater played in the cultivation of the Hungarian language and also advanced the idea that "one can learn more morality from watching a play than from listening to ten sermons." He made short shrift of the comment by a clerical delegate from Kalocsa, who wondered about Jesus' failure in setting up theaters, by sharply retorting that "we should not drag the Lord Jesus here; we are talking about the Hungarian language." More

16 Sámuel Kovács, "A játékszín mellett egy-két szó" [A few words in support of the theater], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* XI (1825), 101–2; András Horváth, *A nemes szívű magyarokhoz a pesti nemzeti theatrom ügyében* [To the noble-hearted Hungarians for the sake of a national theater in Pest] (Pozsony, 1825), 3, 7, 12.

17 Solt, *Dramaturgiai irodalmunk kezdetei*, 114–5.

ominously, the suggestion of eliminating the competitor, the German theater, surfaced as well, advocated by none other than Tamás Ragályi of Borsod County, one of the leaders at the diet.¹⁸

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, music in Hungary was essentially running on two parallel tracks. The first one, borrowed from Vienna, was connected to the German theater, functioning as a mediator of musical culture, with the Hungarian theater as one of its recipients. The programs were varied, ranging from lighter musical fare through operas to the classics, and German inhabitants in towns were their primary audience. Apart from Viennese influences, some of the orchestras and music schools established in aristocratic residences offered another impetus to the musical life of the country. The Esterházy orchestra had Joseph Haydn as its conductor and resident composer, and J.N. Hummel followed in his footsteps. Count György Festetics established a music school in Keszthely, and Beethoven himself was in touch with Count Ferenc Brunswick and Miklós Zmeskál, his friends in Hungary. As far as operas were concerned, they remained in the tradition of the Austro-German *Singspiel*, that is, they followed the custom of spoken dialogues between songs. Mozart's operas, quite popular in Hungary, may have had more music than others, but they belonged to the same genre. Several choral societies existed, not only in Pest, where one was led by Lajos Schedius himself, but also in Veszprém County and in Sopron, where Haydn's "Creation Oratory" was first performed in 1804.¹⁹

The other trend in music was perceived as authentically Hungarian, the *verbunkos*, which accompanied recruiting activities into the army. Although its origins reached back a mere hundred years and the music was constructed from a mixture of components, old Hungarian, to be sure, but also Slavic, German, and Viennese-Italian among others,

18 Miklós Bényei (ed.), *Reformkori országgyűlések színházi vitái* [The discussions of diets during the Age of Reform on the theater] (Budapest, 1985), 21, 24.

19 Fancsali, "Biedermeier a magyar zenében," 185–6; László Dobszay, *A history of Hungarian music* (Budapest, 1993; originally published in Hungarian in 1984), 101, 103, 104; Tibor Tallián, "From Singspiel to post-modern: Two hundred years of Hungarian opera," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 44 (Spring, 2003) 145; "A Pesti muzsikai intézet" [The musical institution in Pest], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* V (1818), 141; Gábor Sebestyén, "Veszprém vármegyei muzsikás intézet" [The musical institution in Veszprém County], *ibid.*, III (1825), 87; Endre Csatkai, "Haydn *Teremtés* című oratóriumának első soproni előadása" [The first performance of Haydn's *Creation* oratory in Sopron], *Soproni Szemle* 12, no. 2 (1958), 154.

music this came to be regarded as ancient Hungarian music of Asian origin. As such, it became part and parcel of Hungarian cultural nationalism. It was fiery, rhythmic, and highly emotional. Csokonai already celebrated it in his play, *Dorottya*, admiring that “noble Hungarian dance that arrived together with our language and dress... its nobility glitters in Asiatic colors.”²⁰

The musicians who mostly played that music were gypsies, a group that was still small in the early part of the century, a mere 1.8% of the population. Of those only 6% played music, but they played it very well. The most famous of them was János Bihari. Ferenc Liszt listened to him at age 11 and was mesmerized by the sound of Bihari’s violin. Not everybody was enchanted. József Csehy complained to Kazinczy that music in Hungary had become gypsy music, and he hoped that in time “we can extricate ourselves from that.” Csehy was very much in the minority. The *verbunkos*, which was partly music and partly dance, became very popular in patriotic circles. István Horvát reported in his diary about the rapturous enthusiasm which young people in a ballroom—even those in German dress—felt when the band struck up a *verbunkos*. “All started moving and felt that, casting aside earlier day-dreaming, Hungarians are the ruling nation in our country.” By the middle to late 1820s, articles containing such statements as “the nation lives in its music” and “music is one branch of ‘pallérozás’ that puts a distinct stamp on a nation’s character” were appearing.²¹

Dynasties of architects led their field in Hungary, and the best known was the Hild family. János Hild was a close associate of Palatine Joseph, and his two sons followed in their father’s footsteps. József Hild became active in the 1820s, participating in the design of several cathedrals, in addition to houses in Pest-Buda. Other architect dynasties were the Zitterbach and Brein families. Their work featured the classical style, which gave a sense of stability and permanence, as well as a presumed connection with the Ancient past, relinquishing, for the most part,

20 Bence Szabolcsi, *A Concise History of Hungarian Music* (Budapest, 1974), 54; quoted in Szabolcsi, “A magyar zenei romantika eszmevilága” [The romantic world of ideas in Hungarian music], *Budapesti Szemle* (1933), 304.

21 Szabolcsi, “A magyar zenei romantika eszmevilága,” 299; Bence Szabolcsi (ed.), *A magyar zene évszázadai. Tanulmányok* [The centuries of Hungarian music: Studies] (Budapest, 1961), 153; József Csehy to Kazinczy, October 9, 1807, *Kazinczy* 5: 187; Temesi and Szauderné, *Mindennapi*, 72–3, 1806; *Hasznos Mulatságok* II (1824), 289, and VII (1829), 49.

baroque flourishes. For a long time, painting remained beholden to the classical style, suggesting stability and the continuing preponderance of architecture. Subject matters were often historical with a certain romantic touch. Biedermeyer paintings were also popular, reflecting another kind of yearning for even-tempered steadiness and stability. A few artists, such as Ede Spiro, managed to study in Rome during the 1820s. So did the most talented artist, the sculptor János Ferenczy. "What a glorious career you have" wrote Kazinczy to the artist, "[and] you are the first Magyar who has brought luster to our nation. Your fame is going to last forever, while mine... will be forgotten in one or two decades." This prediction turned out to be mistaken, because, in time, Ferenczy alienated the Hungarian public with what was regarded as his cold classical style.²²

CULTURAL BREAKTHROUGHS: ROMANTICISM

The original goals of cultural nationalism in Hungary had been limited to the advancement of the Hungarian language, literature, and theater. However, because criticism was an integral part of these endeavors, it became impossible to slow down, much less to stop, the multiple inquiries that critical thinking engendered. At the same time, certain limits were honored. Unrest in certain parts of Germany, Italy, and Spain, as well as armed rebellion in Greece, triggered even more restrictive policies by Vienna, controlled by Prince Metternich and Count Joseph Sedlnitzky, minister of police from 1817 until 1848, during the 1820s. Although no policies of enforced submission succeeded in eliminating displays of the traditional grievance mentality in several Hungarian counties, it became even less advisable than before to mount open challenges against the authorities. Nevertheless, hindsight makes clear that apolitical ideas and trends did in time undermine, or at least loosen, some of the traditional bonds in Hungary's economic, social, and political system. Critical thinking itself, underlying these apolitical ideas and trends, became the most subversive development, because it could potentially penetrate into hitherto forbidden areas. Romanticism, disdainning moderation, and whipping up patriotic passions, was not yet such

22 Mérei and Vörös, *Magyarország története 1790–1848*, 2: 1103–6; Gabriella D. Szvoboda, "A biedermeier és a nemzeti festőiskola" [The Biedermeyer and the national school of painting], *Helikon*, nos. 1–2 (1991), 200–5; Lyka, *Magyar művészet*, 36, 484–5; Kazinczy to István Ferenczy, January 17, 1823, *Kazinczy* 18: 236.

an area; rather, it functioned as a preparatory ground for such a cultural penetration, by force of its passionate character.

Romanticism, like nationalism, has been open to numerous definitions. In 1925, a Belgian scholar came up with one hundred and fifty of them. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some common denominators that reflect not so much any particular romantic movement or the specific ideas of any of its protagonists, but accentuate what Eugen Weber called the romantic spirit common to all the manifestations of romanticism. He believed that such a spirit was “an intellectual reaction against the eighteenth century ideals of order, discipline and reason.” Emphasizing freedom in an individual sense, romanticism also stressed inspiration and originality, with little or no reliance on classical models, and denied enlightened universalism with its insistence on the local, the particular, or even the peculiar.²³ Other related attributes included emotionalism, passion, imagination, fantasy, spontaneity, and preference for subjectivity.

Romanticism had its roots in the sentimentalism of the middle to late eighteenth century, which, in turn, issued from a new kind of appreciation of human beings as well-rounded individuals. In Hungary, this trend, following the French model, focused on feelings, sentiments, and their moral consequences, rather than imitating the British example that stressed the social and historical significance of this phenomenon.²⁴ Also, sentimentalism, by restricting itself mostly to conveying intimate feelings, shied away from larger themes, such as delving into the historical past or even enlarging and enriching the scope of its subject matters. Romanticism had already filled these gaps. Romanticism appeared later in Eastern Europe than in France or England. Such a lag in time should not, however, be taken as a sign of aesthetic inferiority.²⁵

23 Eugen Weber (ed.), *Movements, Currents, Trends: Aspects of European Thought in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Lexington, 1992), 13.

24 Attila Debreczeni, *Tudós hazafiak és érzékeny emberek. Integráció és elkülönülés a XVIII. század végének magyar irodalmában* [Learned patriots and sensitive people: Hungarian literature's integration and separation in the late 18th century] (Budapest, 2009), 108.

25 Antal Wéber, “Nemzeti romantikánk eredete és kialakulása” [The origin and development of our national romanticism] in Márta Mezei and Antal Wéber (eds.), *Mesterség és alkotás* [Profession and creation] (Budapest, 1972), 204; István Fried, “A kelet-európai romantika néhány jellegzetessége” [Some of the characteristics of East-European romanticism], *Az Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár Évkönyve* (1976–77), 452.

A striking characteristic of romanticism in Hungary was its tenet of originality, which entailed respect for the artist's individuality and independence and granted far more chances for self-revelation and poetic imagination than ever before. This trend, undoubtedly overshadowed the much more measured classical culture, which was demonstrated by Kazinczy's declining influence in the 1820s, although it did not eliminate it. The classical tradition was too strong, the Latinate scholarship and reverence for the Ancients was too deeply entrenched for these cultural attachments suddenly to disappear.²⁶

Romanticism was not a political platform, but, rather a mood, a certain way of looking at the world. As such, it could either be apolitical or applied to widely divergent political objectives. While many German romantics engaged in a backward-looking resurrection of the Middle Ages, Lord Byron represented revolutionary romanticism, although, as Richard van Dülmen has pointed out, even German romanticism was too varied to be reduced solely to a conservative tendency.²⁷

According to János Horváth, romanticism in Hungary was political, not in the realm of party politics, but in the sense of its politics becoming engaged with the nation's very existence through its concern with the renewal of the Hungarian language.²⁸ If politics is defined so broadly, then Horváth was right, but the patriotism that underlay this renewal united many Hungarians, regardless of their political views or ideological orientations. Important differences are lost if politics is interpreted so broadly. Perhaps it is more accurate to characterize romanticism in Hungary as another manifestation of cultural nationalism. This approach would cover everybody from the dreamer of nationalistic fantasies that István Horvát became to the highly intellectual Ferenc Kölcsey. Some of the romantics, including the young Mihály Vörösmarty, did become involved in politics, but that kind of politics, starting in a few counties in the early 1820s and developing into

26 István Fenyő, "A romantikus eredetiség-program kialakulása" [The formation of the romantic originality program] in István Fenyő, Béla G. Németh, and István Sötér (eds.), *Irányok, romantika, népiesség, pozitivizmus* [Trends, romanticism, populism, positivism] (Budapest, 1981), 7. Fenyő dates the appearance of this trend in the period between 1815 and 1817, *ibid.*, 7–8; Wéber, "Nemzeti romantikánk eredete és kialakulása," 205.

27 J.L. Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt: Europe, 1815–1848* (New York, 1967), 157–60; Richard van Dülmen, *Poesie des Lebens. Eine Kulturgeschichte der deutschen Romantik, 1795–1820* (Köln–Weimar–Wien, 2002), 1.

28 Horváth, *A magyar irodalom fejlődéstörténete*, 263.

the diet of 1825–27, was essentially defensive, a continuation of the old grievance politics.

A new truly liberal politics was not yet on the agenda. Apart from the young Vörösmarty, others in the romantic movement were largely apolitical. Two young promising men of literature, Ferenc Toldy and József Bajza, carried on an extensive correspondence throughout the 1820s, in which no emotions were held back. The primary topics of this correspondence centered on their passionate friendship, their friendships with or scorn for fellow writers, their love affairs, literature in Hungary, and their readings and related other interests. This is not to say that they were indifferent to what was going on in Hungary. Toldy was of German origin, but he transcended the *Hungarus* stage and became a Hungarian patriot, an exemplary cultural nationalist. As such, he complained to Bajza that, during his stay in Sáros County in November, 1824, he had encountered “intolerable passivity by members of social circles.” It is nevertheless true that Toldy was less interested in politics than in matters of culture; he was ecstatic when an almanac carrying the promise of women in Hungary reading literature in Hungarian was published.²⁹

Bajza was relatively more involved in political matters, although his primary concerns were identical with those of Toldy. His planned response to a censor, who was on the verge of proscribing his work, was not to fight back, but to stop writing altogether. In another letter to Toldy, he warned his friend to stay away from József Ponori Thewrewk who, he thought, was a “good-for-nothing” police spy. Bajza did briefly become extremely political during the initial period of the 1825–27 diet, where he occupied a minor position in the delegation of Heves County. He was much impressed by and enthusiastically endorsed the program of the patriotic opposition, which largely amounted to a continuation of traditionalist politics of grievances. By 1826, however, Bajza became severely disillusioned, reporting to Toldy that, while

29 László Deme, “The romantic image of military conquest and national defense: The poetry of Mihály Vörösmarty” in Béla Király (ed.), *East Central European Society in the Era of Revolutions, 1775–1856* (New York, 1984), 357; Ambrus Oltványi (ed.), *Bajza József és Toldy Ferenc levelezése* [The correspondence between József Bajza and Ferenc Toldy] (Budapest, 1969); Péter Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése: Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet* [The birth of a national science: Ferenc Toldy and Hungarian literary history] (Budapest, 2004), 147; Oltványi, *Bajza József és Toldy Ferenc levelezése*, 175–6, 16.

he was still interested in the proceedings, he would love to leave them. In February, 1826, he reported that “Nagyapáthy left Pozsony, bored by its monotony and pious declarations.” Four months later, he was sounding desperate. “This diet harmed me a great deal,” he wrote to Toldy. “I wish I would have never come. All that I had imagined about my country and nation collapsed.” Fearing for his nation’s future, Bajza blamed the selfishness and hypocrisy of the delegates for his disillusionment. When the news of the royal resolution ending the diet in March, 1827 arrived, he welcomed it.³⁰

Similar disillusionment characterized two other major figures of Hungarian romanticism, Károly Kisfaludy and Ferenc Kölcsey. Again, their preoccupation with matters of culture did not lead to indifference about their country, especially not in Kölcsey’s case. Preoccupation with cultural issues functioned as a distancing mechanism from the nuts and bolts of county and national politics, in which they both had diminishing faith. An exchange of letters between Kisfaludy and Kölcsey in 1827 is very revealing. On August 20, 1827, Kisfaludy wrote to Kölcsey that “the diet came to an end—the cause of our language along with that of our country has gradually declined, [and] the ephemeral enthusiasm shoves us into even greater darkness... there is no part of our land where good people do not know this.” Kölcsey’s response was equally grim. “I received your sad notice about the diet. Who does not feel that pain?” he wrote. “New wounds are bound up with the old ones... we must endure my friend, patience is a human virtue.”³¹

Notwithstanding this kind of disillusionment, an overriding and universal concern for the country, certainly among members of the activist minority, precluded the kind of extreme romantic individualism exhibited by the Russian poet, Mikhail Lermontov.³² Still, rather than characterizing romanticism in Hungary as consistently enlightened and politically progressive, which was sporadically true at best, Hungarian

30 Oltványi, *Bajza József és Toldy Ferenc levelezése*, 132, 362, 255–6, 361–4, 283, 311, 396; József Szűcsi, *Bajza József* (Budapest, 1914), 25–8.

31 Zoltán Szabó G. (ed.), *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése, válogatás* [The correspondence of Ferenc Kölcsey, a selection] (Budapest, 1990), 95, 98.

32 Although Tsar Nicholas I’s repressive policies made open political discussions impossible in Russia, Belinsky and Herzen for instance were upset by Lermontov’s apparent disinterest in the issues of the day. David Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I’s Russia* (Evanston, 2005), 404.

romanticism should be perceived as a collectivist collaborative effort in the service of cultural nationalist objectives, respecting the originality and the individual autonomy of its protagonists. As befitted a romantic movement, the movement of cultural nationalism was passionate in its principal concern for the nation as a whole through the preservation and advancement of its culture.

Furthermore, a not negligible significance of romanticism in Hungary rested in its vast potential for change. Once liberalism did penetrate into Hungary and fused with nationalism, romanticism provided powerful emotional support, and the resulting passionate commitment gave enormous strength to what came to be known as liberal romantic nationalism. Before this happened, romanticism, unconnected to any kind of ideology, had already laid the emotional foundation for such an eventuality.

The activist group of cultural nationalists was not homogeneous. It has been tempting to divide them into enlightened progressives and hard-core traditionalists, but their contemporaries would not have shared this kind of view. They regarded themselves as the embattled vanguard of the nation, and the bonds between them—their shared cultural objectives—were stronger than any possible ideological difference. Why else would Bessenyei have chosen the conservative Pál Ányos as a secretary of a future learned society, and why else would Kazinczy have joined with the equally conservative Dávid Baróti Szabó as a fellow editor of *Magyar Múzeum*?

Several decades later, Kölcsey demonstrated the same disregard for ideological purity, as long as fellow writers and poets whom he liked were authentic Hungarians in the way that he had defined authenticity. In his essay, “Nemzeti hagyományok” (National traditions), written in 1826, Kölcsey, who by then was slowly moving toward the recognition of the peasantry as an integral part of the nation, was still complimentary of such conservatives as Faludi and Ányos and dismissive of Bessenyei, because Kölcsey considered his subjects to be French, even if they were carrying Hungarian names. Also, Kölcsey maintained a friendship with the archconservative Zsigmond Kende, who hailed from Szatmár County as well.³³

33 Ferenc Kölcsey, “Nemzeti hagyományok” [National traditions] in Ferenc Kulin, (ed.), *Nemzet és sokaság. Kölcsey Ferenc válogatott tanulmányai* [Nation and crowds: The selected essays of Ferenc Kölcsey] (Budapest, 1988), 63–4; Ernő Taxner-Tóth, (ed.), *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése Kende Zsigmonddal* [Ferenc Kölcsey’s correspondence with Zsigmond Kende] (Budapest, 1983).

The literati constituting the leadership of this camp carried on a lively social life in the 1820s, mostly in Pest, where they congregated in the homes of László Bártfay and Ferenc Karacs. They had fun, laughed, played, argued, and quarreled. Although most of them were sensitive and easy to take offense, a sense of solidarity, fuelled by their patriotic commitments, held this group together. Their new leader was Károly Kisfaludy. Although a proud nobleman, Kisfaludy was a thoroughly urban bohemian, who, primarily as a playwright, became the natural leader of the literati through his wit, charm, and literary triumphs, first in Vienna and then in Pest. It was he, above all, who had successfully created an independent role for himself and others as writers, for whom literature, not merely a vocation or a hobby, was also a source of livelihood. The journal *Auróra*, which he edited, was filled with engravings, many done by him, as he was also a painter, as well as his poems and pleasing articles. This journal “had a European look which ensured its popularity.”³⁴

Disagreements among the literati were often personal and appear inconsequential in hindsight. What were real were regional differences between them, although these should not be overrated. János Poór is undoubtedly correct in stating that nobles, and most of the literati belonged to that estate, shared an identical “constitutional sensibility,” whatever the region of the country they came from. Still, in mentality, attitudes, and fashions, nobles and commoners, for that matter from Debrecen, or Pest, or Transdanubia, or the Northeast, were quite different from one another. This created frictions not necessarily in principle, but often in practice. Berzsenyi wrote to Kazinczy in 1811 about how one should view the country as a whole, because if one looks only at fragmented parts “one’s knowledge will become one-sided.” Yet, when Berzsenyi visited Pest in 1813, he alienated his fellow writers there by what they perceived as his boorish provincial behavior.³⁵ Kazinczy disliked Debrecen and regarded his friends in Pest as “cold,” and frictions could escalate to the point of making even Vitkovics, well-known for his even-tempered nature, anxious. “Nowadays,” he wrote to Kazinczy, “there are great rifts among Hungarian literati, and opponents of unity

34 George F. Cushing (ed.), *The Passionate Outsider: Studies on Hungarian Literature* (Budapest, 2000), 95.

35 Berzsenyi to Kazinczy, February 15, 1811, *Kazinczy* 8: 325; József Waldapfel, *Ötven év Buda és Pest irodalmi életéből, 1780–1830* [Fifty years from the literary life of Buda and Pest 1780–1830] (Budapest, 1935), 200.

are spreading rumors about how people from one side of the Danube cast suspicion on those on the other side, and the same with people on both sides of the river Tisza. If you ask them about the real reasons [for their disagreements], they do not have an answer.”³⁶

Notwithstanding these rifts, no stronger evidence of this group's attachment to Hungary exists than its preoccupation with its nation's past. Their interpretations offered validation for them, lessons to instruct, and heroism to emulate, reinforcing their senses of permanence and security. “Awareness of history enhances communal and national identity,” David Löwenthal has written, “legitimizing people in their own eyes.” If some of this past was invented or embellished, this made no difference, because history was used, some may say twisted, to serve exactly the kind of legitimation and cohesion that people desired.³⁷

Enlightened and traditionalist writers and poets, although their respective emphasis might have been different, were mining the historical past alike in the late eighteenth century, and this kind of tradition continued well into the nineteenth. Indeed, romanticism merely intensified the emotional temperature, Benedek Virág, in a poem dedicated to József Gvadányi, explicitly stated, “if you wish to remain a Hungarian, you must follow in our blessed ancestors' footsteps.” His historical work, *Magyar századok* (Hungarian centuries), was dedicated to the idea of national unity built around the king, the nobility, and the Church. In his play, *Hunyadi László*, László admonishes his younger brother, Mátyás, “to love your country and enhance its glory; whoever undermines that is a wicked person.” Another play by Sándor Kisfaludy, *Hunyadi János*, played on the same patriotic theme. These plays were didactic, rather than dramatic. Kisfaludy admitted that he composed his plays not as a poet, but as a patriot. The combined result was a portrait of the past that became an integral part of the cultural nationalist program.³⁸

36 László Gyapay, “Kazinczy a debreceniségről” [Kazinczy on things about Debrecen], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 102, nos. 1–2 (1998), 31–66; Kazinczy to Gábor Döbrentei, September 19, 1810, *Kazinczy* 8: 91; Vikovics to Kazinczy, April 24, 1819, *ibid.*, 15: 354.

37 David Löwenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), 44; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

38 Benedek Virág, *Poétai munkái* [Poetic works] (Pest, 1863), 38; Benedek Virág, *Hunyadi László. Tragédia* [László Hunyadi: A tragedy] (Buda, 1817), 55; Sándor Kisfaludy, *Hunyadi János* (Pest, 1814), 1, 10.

Mihály Vörösmarty represented the romantic climax of this search for a usable past. In his epic poem, *Zalán futása* (The escape of Zalán), written in 1823–24 and published in 1825, Vörösmarty had taken up the story of Hungary's conquest. The cry of the very first line of the epic is revealing. "Our old glory, where have you gone in the darkness of night?" Vörösmarty asked. The rest of the epic reflected a strong desire to recapture past glory. At the same time, literary precedents showed that no Hungarian poet could dismiss the dark periods in the nation's history. Those, too, had their functions in collective memory as much as the triumphs did. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch has stated, "an emphatic philosophy of defeat seeks to identify and appreciate the significance of defeat itself." In a concrete example, he mentions France's "tendency to transform military defeat into spiritual triumphs" after France had been disastrously defeated by Prussia in 1870. "Saving Paris means more than saving France," Victor Hugo wrote, "it means saving the world. For Paris is the heart of humanity, its holy city, the capital of civilization."³⁹

Romanticism was not essential for this exploration, but it certainly provided the poetic passion that fuelled the enthusiastic inspiration sustaining it. Kölcsey grasped this fact when, in his "Nemzeti hagyományok," he compared the yearning for past glory to "poetic sentiment," equating the two and characterizing both as heroic. He understandably emphasized the bright and glorious past that, in his opinion, formed the essence of national traditions as "the guiding star of patriotism." This was the reason why the Hunyadis had been celebrated so much, because the fifteenth century had been a period of glory. But Kölcsey also brought up the terrible defeat at Mohács in 1526 by the Turks, when "public happiness went under." Yet, this defeat was followed by defiance and resurgence of patriotic self-sacrifice, an idea that Kölcsey repeated in his essay, "Mohács," written in the same year.⁴⁰

39 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (London, 2004), 2, 122, 123.

40 Kölcsey, "Nemzeti hagyományok," 38, 39, 41, 51, 57, 58, 50. According to Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, this essay embodied the romantic ideal of an autonomous national culture. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, "Irodalom és művészetek a XVIII. század elejétől napjainkig [Literature and the arts from the beginning of the 18th century to our own times] in László Kósa (ed.), *A magyarságtudomány kézikönyve* [The handbook of Hungarian Studies] (Budapest, 1991), 572; Kölcsey, "Mohács" in Kulin (ed.), *Nemzet és sokaság*, 292.

Kölcsey saw both parts, the Hungarian nation as “the poor refugee nation” and also “the glorious nation,” writing that light and darkness alternated in the history of Hungary. Nowhere else did he more eloquently express this thought than in his beautiful poem, “Hymnus,” composed in 1823, that was to become the country’s national anthem. No major triumph or calamity was left unmentioned in this poem, and Kölcsey implored God to protect Hungarians who had suffered enough and had atoned for their sins.⁴¹

If romantic imagination magnified both the bright and the dark sides of the nation’s history, the foundations for this, with a lopsided stress on the dark, were increasingly evident in the present. Already in the eighteenth century, some knowledgeable and sensitive Hungarians became aware of the gulf between the west and their country, which, while developed in certain areas, was far less so in others, in comparison with some parts of the fast-progressing west. By the 1820s, the perception of this gulf had grown ever larger. Kultsár’s newspaper, the *Hazai és Külföldi Tudósítások*, ignoring the authorities’ prohibition, already started in 1807 to print news from abroad. *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* followed suit with a special column entitled “News from Abroad.” Various Hungarian travelers, including Count István Széchenyi and his friend Baron Miklós Wesselényi, contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about the west upon returning home.⁴²

The result of all this was devastating to members of the alert activist minority. Many of them thought that any further delay in catching up with the west would be tantamount to losing a major battle in a war. This would, in their opinion, lead to the ultimate nightmare, the nation’s extinction, a vision most dramatically imagined by Vörösmarty in his poem, “Szózat” (Appeal). “The image of battling to the last man so that the end is not capitulation but extinction, plays a central role in

41 Kölcsey, “Nemzeti hagyományok,” 56; Benedek Jancsó (ed.), *Kölcsey Ferenc válogatott munkái* [Selected works of Ferenc Kölcsey] (Budapest, 1903), 41–2.

42 “It was a pleasure to hear,” wrote Kazinczy to Wesselényi, “that you succeeded to go abroad, and I was delighted to hear that you arrived home from London. I wish I could have been there with you as you made us [Hungarians] liked by those haughty and power-thirsty Brits. I am certain that you are pleased that you made that journey and even more that you are home and feel to be a Magyar again.” Kazinczy to Baron Miklós Wesselényi, December 6, 1822, *Kazinczy* 18: 202–3.

the mythology of many cultures,” Schivelbusch has pointed out. “In this scenario, defeat is seen as the highest form of exaltation.”⁴³

Some of the news items from abroad were trivial, because criteria of selection, differentiating between what was significant and what was not, were not yet well-developed. Such items as how laughing cures illnesses, how the son of Murat, the onetime king of Naples, made it to the United States and became an attorney, and how Cardinal Richelieu was the first who imported chocolate into France in 1626 were mentioned in the 1829 issues of the *Hasznos Mulatságok*.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the world around Hungary was changing fast, and accounts of significant events in Greece, Spain, and elsewhere were also published.

Articles in *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* reflected the desire to catch up with the west. Although György Fejér, its first editor, was a conservative member of the cultural nationalist elite, he, introducing the first edition of the journal, lamented about how scholarship was approaching perfection abroad, while Hungary was falling behind, and how Hungarians had to do everything possible to remedy this situation. In subsequent issues, suggestions about making journalism a reputable separate profession, condemning the torture of animals, following the example of the English, German, and French nations in appreciating archeology, building a bridge between Buda and Pest through the financial contributions of all, and finally, properly reimbursing writers for their work were presented.⁴⁵

Articles in other journals were even bolder. An anonymous author questioned the justification of respect that the nobility had arrogated for itself on no or on flimsy grounds, and Gergely Árvay claimed that “genuine nobility derives from sober brains and honest hearts. All else is false.” Another article compared scholarship to a “holy fire” which makes men truly noble; whoever allows this fire to die down should be thrown into the fire himself, the author stated. Although scorned by the younger generation, Kazinczy still held true to his principles, insisting that “the objective of patriotism cannot be to defend what is old.”

43 Ernő Taxner-Tóth, “A világ változásai a *Hazai és Külföldi Tudósításokban*” [The changes of the world in the *Hazai és Külföldi Tudósítások*], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 93, no. 4 (1998), 3376; Gyulai, *Vörösmarty összes munkái* 1: 186–9; Schivelbusch, *The culture of defeat*, 63.

44 *Hasznos Mulatságok*, nos. 12, 18, and 5 (1829).

45 *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, vol. I (1817), 43; vol. VII (1818), 115; vol. V (1820), 87; vol. V (1821), 25; vol. II (1828), 88–9; vol. III (1826), 71–93.

As someone who had seen it all, Kazinczy was optimistic about the future of his nation, and he justly claimed credit for having been a pioneer in his country's progress.⁴⁶

The journal was also most generous in giving space for those fighting for women's equality. Éva Takáts, who was married to the copperplate engraver Ferenc Karacs and whose home was one of the favorite meeting places of the young literati, took the lead in promoting it. She wrote several articles that were as passionate as they were articulately and cleverly argued. In one passage, she defined good marriage as based on mutual trust between husband and wife. This in turn, would benefit the children and make it possible for the wives to discharge their obligations, out of love, not fear.⁴⁷

Although a few articles by men who still believed in women's inferiority and submissiveness to men were published, the majority of male contributors proved to be champions for women's equality. Their motives could be slightly different. Two young army officers who became well-known writers later, Károly Kiss and Gusztáv Szontágh, supported women's equality from a sense of gallantry and justice, while András Thaisz, the editor of the journal between 1819 and 1827, did the same from a sense of fairness. An obscure teacher of the Classics, János Szép, published a small scholarly treatise in the journal. He listed three reasons why promoting women's equality should be done. First, he argued, women were equal to men both in spirit and in reasoning; second, women bring up children and they therefore, need knowledge in order to educate them. Finally, if they do all this well, then they are discharging their obligations not only as mothers, but also as citizens. Szép knew about Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the early pioneers of feminism in the west.⁴⁸

46 *Felső Magyar Országai Minerva* (May, 1826), 711–4; 704–11; *Auróra* (1829), 51; *Felső Magyar Országai Minerva* (August, 1829), 628; *Élet és Literaturá* (1826), 257.

47 Éva Takáts, "Egy két szó a házasságban lévő asszonyok kötelességeikről" [A few words about the obligations of married women], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* 8 (1823), 69.

48 *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* VIII (1826), 72–104; XII (1821), 91–4; János Szép, "Elmélkedés az asszonyi nem taníttatásáról" [Thoughts on women's education], *ibid.* IV (1821), 23, 30, 35. A good compendium on this question is Anna Fábri (ed.), *A nő és hivatása. Szemelvények a magyarországi nők kérdés történetéből, 1777–1865* [The woman and her calling: Selections from the history of the women's question 1777–1865] (Budapest, 1999).

Some women also took public initiatives. For example, in 1817, an association that became instrumental in providing financial, educational and medical support for the indigents in Pest was established. The women who led and participated in this association succeeded, within the realm of possibilities, in building a safety net for these indigents.⁴⁹

Several articles discussed the question of education. Unlike the articles on the role of women, these articles were dominated by conservatives. Perhaps the reason for this disparity was the fact that, while the discussion on women was conducted on a rather abstract level, matters of education had to do with future generations and were therefore deemed of vital importance, above all, for conservatives, who felt threatened by changes and tried to secure the continued imposition of their values, which they regarded as perennial axioms. Nevertheless, the fact that majority of the conservative authors felt compelled to respond to the challenges posed by modern pedagogy resulted in some form of involvement with the outside world. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the Swiss educator, presented the primary challenge. He wished to replace education based on robot-like memorization and iron discipline with an emphasis on children's individual development and concrete life experiences. Although Lajos Schedius defended Pestalozzi against what he considered groundless charges, most articles about him and his educational philosophy were hostile. The first issue of the journal published a typical example by Lajos Fölnesics, who was scandalized by the thought that a child could think on his own. According to Fölnesics, this approach to education would lead to a loss of faith in morality and religion, total licentiousness, disobedience to the authorities, broken marriages, popular sovereignty, and violence against the parents. "True education has to lead to spiritual perfection through the means of Christian morality, completely antithetical to Pestalozzism," Fölnesics concluded.⁵⁰

49 Árpád Tóth, *Önszervező polgárok. A pesti egyesületek társadalomtörténete a reformkorban* [Self-motivated citizens: The social history of associations in the Age of Reform] (Budapest, 2005), 59–60.

50 Lajos Schedius, "A pestalozzizmus ellen való észrevételekről" [On the opinions against Pestalozzism], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* I (1817), 115–21; Lajos Fölnesics, "Észrevételek a pestalozzizmus ellen" [Opinions against Pestalozzism], *ibid.* I (1817), 83–100.

Apart from these and other issues, discontent in certain circles was brewing about the specific economic backwardness of Hungary. Already in 1811, József Ürményi commiserated to Kazinczy about the fact that he was growing old without experiencing his country's advancement in agriculture, artisanship, commerce, and manufacturing to the point "where other European nations and countries stand now." In order to reach that objective, Ürményi urged his compatriots "to gather all their strength and efforts and respect our national existence sufficiently to overcome the objections of the numerous opposition."⁵¹

Ürményi's exhortations did not, by and large, bear fruit, but he was not alone in his quest for modernization. Gergely Berzeviczy had been agitating for this even before Ürményi. In his book on Hungary's commerce and industry, published in 1802, Berzeviczy lamented the sorry state of both through ignorance, neglect, and misuse of resources. To accusations that the reasons for this lay in people's laziness and conceit, the author reminded his readers that, even in Hungary, there were clever and industrious entrepreneurs, whose talents were, however, unused or insufficiently utilized.⁵² Tragically for the author, his refusal to participate in any form of cultural nationalism isolated him and severely limited his influence, although it would have been limited in any case as long as most noblemen remained opposed to any call for modernization. The visionary engineer, István Vedres, stood very much in the mainstream of conservative traditionalism in non-economic matters, yet his influence in his area of expertise did not extend much beyond his city, Szeged, where he served as the city engineer between 1786 and 1821.⁵³

As late as 1840, Mihály Horváth, while listing several legislative decrees in support of economic development, was compelled to conclude that most of them were not yet realized. He placed much of the blame on the "medieval and miserly" system of guilds. A later book reinforced this view, placing it into a comparative framework. Gyula Kautz contrasted a more enlightened, humane, and universal approach to solving economic and social problems in the west with "many pre-

51 József Ürményi to Kazinczy, April 1, 1811, *Kazinczy* 8: 429–31.

52 Berzeviczy, *Ungarns industrie und kommerz*, 9–20.

53 István Vedres, *Egy nemzeti jószág, melyet Magyar Ország és a hozzá kaptolt tartományok számára s javára szerzett* [National economy for Hungary and for its attached provinces] (Szeged, 1807), 3, 7, 70.

judices, medievalism, and stingy class egotism” in Hungary. When posing this contrast, Kautz was overrating western approaches, but the comparison was, in reality, nonetheless unfavorable to Hungary, although Kautz did register, as Horváth had before him, some positive developments, starting in the 1830s.⁵⁴

Whatever deficiencies the west had in the 1820s, its accomplishments glowed in comparison with those in Hungary. Awareness of this discrepancy was bound to increase in time, especially because agriculture, the bulk of Hungary’s economy, was in crisis. The level of production was relatively low, and, while some of the great landed estates could adjust to a diminished market, the medium and small lands generally failed to do so. The principal problems were a shortage of capital, which accounted for a lack of adequate credit, leading to an escalating disaster of amassing debts.⁵⁵ Yet, the traditionalist majority, still obsessed with the defense of its privileges and various grievances, turned a blind eye to economic and social problems. The principal concerns of the activist minority also lay outside the economic sphere, though a few exceptions did exist. Antal Mocsáry was a county official, a minor poet, and a writer. In the history of his county, Nógrád, he bitterly complained not only about the lack of libraries and printing presses, but also about weak commerce and the lack of factories. “Why do not landowners get together, pool their money and establish factories?” Mocsáry asked. “If in England the lords can do it, why can that not happen in our country, even if to a lesser degree?”⁵⁶

Some agricultural experts had made useful suggestions, which, if accepted, would have cured some of the symptoms, but not the underlying problems. Ferenc Pethe and János Nagyváthy were such experts, but it was János Balásházy who, starting in the mid-1820s, exerted the most significant impact. A traditionalist from Zemplén County, he had faith in “our-eight-hundred-years-old constitution” and in the Habsburg Monarchy, but he also insisted on promoting “diligence, reasoning

54 Horváth, *Az ipar és kereskedelem története Magyarországon*, 271, 321; Kautz, *A nemzetgazdasági eszmék fejlődési története*, 238–9, 247; Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, 230.

55 László Ungár, “A magyar nemesi birtok eladósodása 1848 előtt” [The indebtedness of nobles’ property before 1848], *Századok* 69, no. 3 (1935), 41–2.

56 Antal Mocsáry, *Nemes Nógrád vármegyének históriai, geográfiai és statisztikai ismertetése* [The historical, geographical and statistical survey of noble Nógrád County], 4 volumes (Pest, 1826), 4: 248, 249, 247, 251.

and efforts [to improve].” By the early 1830s, he was developing concrete proposals in line with the ideas of Count Széchenyi.⁵⁷

For all the unresolved problems, the 1820s were still a transitional period, when even some of those who had advocated going forward had occasional misgivings. An anonymous author, discussing innovations, claimed that they can be just as damaging as adhering stubbornly to the past. Innovations should therefore be introduced “quietly, gradually, silently, almost unobservedly... and only when absolutely necessary.” The surveyor János Udvardy felt that, although searching for flaws in the country was necessary, this would be like entering a labyrinth and should lead, at the end, to reaffirming stability, based on a “pure and just morality.” The Lutheran pastor, Pál Edvi Illés, counseled his readers not to wish for the return of the old days, but, at the same time, he urged them to enjoy living in the present, in spite of its absurdities, and to reject pipe dreams about the future. In some issues of the *Felső Magyar Országí Minerva*, modern thoughts and total nonsense were indiscriminately mixed together. In one, János Kis praised the value of scholarship, but a few months later, a certain Basilus Dohovits dismissed Descartes, and later, in another issue, denied Newton’s theory of gravity. That particular piece was published at the same time as a serious article on political economy, extracted from *The Edinburgh Review*.⁵⁸

A combination of tolerance for all kinds of ideas and the essential traditionalist consensus made possible the publication of thoroughly conservative articles in *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*. Its first editor, György Fejér, led the way in forging this particular combination. He indignantly rejected the accusation against the nobility for not sharing the tax burden. “They are not Hottentots who refuse to contribute to the public good,” Fejér argued. “Look at the many institutions, schools, and churches they are supporting... nor does the country lack culture, as

57 János Balásházy, *Tanátsolatok a magyarországi mezőgazdák számára* [Suggestions for landowners from Hungary] (Sárospatak, 1829), 26, 58; Lóránt Tilkovszky, *Balásházy János* (Budapest, 1970), 13.

58 Anonymous, “Az ujjíításokról” [On innovations], *Felső Magyar Országí Minerva* (February, 1829), 135; János Udvardy, “Felkiáltás a haza ügyében” [Appeal for the country], *ibid.* (April, 1829), 251; Pál Edvi Illés, “Időnk geniusáról” [On the genius of our times], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* III (1829), 1 *Felső Magyar Országí Minerva* (June and November, 1825); *Minerva* (June and November, 1825); *ibid.* (February, May, August and October, 1828).

the Palatine and the Vice-Regal Council are doing a great deal in this regard, as do our towns.” According to Fejér, the serfs were also doing reasonably well. In conclusion, he reminded the journal’s readers that “the nobility is the crowning adornment in our noble country, noted for their dignity and heroism. Their liberties and privileges are objects of envy.” In an 1824 issue, Antal Meritzay mused about the Enlightenment, which he approved in principle but condemned for its subversion of religion. István Vedres blamed the French Revolution for “spreading dreadful misfortune” and for “cunningly smuggling in the slogans of liberty and equality.” In his interpretation, both slogans were abused, dispossessing people and encouraging treachery and murder.⁵⁹

The lively discussions among the literati and the sporadic displays of progressive ideas may easily lull even historians into forgetting just how conservative Hungary still was in the 1820s. A perceptive German traveler, August Ellrich, knew better. He remarked, perhaps with some exaggeration but basically accurately, that the only difference between prosperous and poor nobles was that the former ate, drank, and smoked more. Sámuel Kiss Apáthi despaired over the Hungarian reading public’s preference for mush and ignored the debate among the literati as “useless pastimes.” He also bemoaned the fact that so few people subscribed to serious journals; “there are counties where subscribers number 3 or 4 or none,” he lamented.⁶⁰

Even in the relatively more cultured environment of Northern Hungary, in Sáros County, Ferenc Pulszky remembered in his memoirs the sadness he felt over his brother’s suicide. The cause was unhappy love, but, Ferenc thought, his brother’s life might not have taken such a tragic turn if he could have found some diversion in the pursuit

59 György Fejér, “A magyar nemzet kulturájáról különösen” [About the culture of the Hungarian nation], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* III (1817), 35–41; Fejér, “A nemességről” [About the nobility], *ibid.* XI (1820), 3; Antal Meritzay, “Egy szó a mostani felvilágosodásról” [A word about the current Enlightenment], *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* II (1824), 79–81; István Vedres, “Némelly hazafiúi emlékeztető szavak a magyarok nemzeti lelke és characterre felől” [Some patriotic words on the national soul and character of Hungarians], *ibid.* VI (1822), 33.

60 August Ellrich, *Die Ungarn. Wie Sie sind* (Berlin, 1831), 45; Sámuel Kiss Apáthi, “Többféle tárgyú levelek [Letters on various subjects], *Felső Magyar Országai Minerva* (February, 1829), 17.

of public affairs. "As it was," Pulszky wrote, "he could find nothing in our northern Hungarian life that would have suited his high-minded ideals."⁶¹

In the early 1820s, the court demanded recruits and money, the latter not in bills but in silver coins, which in fact signified a considerable tax increase. These demands were not presented at a diet, as tradition had required. In the spring of 1823, the counties were in an uproar, and the king had to send royal commissioners to restore order in certain counties, sometimes with the help of army troops.⁶²

Pulszky remembered that, in Sáros County, which was by no means among the more recalcitrant counties, "in the county assembly everybody was freely talking politics, alluding to the constitution and scolding the Germans." At first Metternich overreacted, even though in Sáros, for instance, as Pulszky recollected, "chasing skirts was the primary objective, but in Vienna (the authorities) regarded any patriotic association as a branch of the Carbonaris." Even in Bars County, which was the initiator of protests and appeared to be the toughest, the ringleaders of the protest went to Vienna and succumbed to a personal scolding by the king. One of these leaders, Mihály Platthy, was eventually silenced by the offer of a government job. At the end, Metternich relented for the possible reason that he realized that this movement by the counties was not, for all its occasional incendiary rhetoric, a revolutionary movement, trying to upset the status quo, but in fact an attempt to restore it and make it possible for members of the nobility to pursue their politics of grievance at the customary milieu of a diet. Also, as a practical matter, short of a military intervention, Vienna lacked the effective means to liquidate the deeply entrenched Austro-Hungarian dualist system. For all these likely reasons, Metternich persuaded the king finally to convoke a diet in July, 1825, after more than a decade of hiatus.⁶³

61 Ferenc Pulszky, *Életem és korom* [My life and epoch], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1958; originally published in 1880), 1: 49–50.

62 Kosáry, 234.

63 Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 52–3; Mihály Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarországtörténelméből, 1823–1848* (Twenty-five years of Hungarian history 1823–1848), 3 volumes (Budapest, 1886), 1: 129; Pajkossy, "Az abszolutizmus és a rendiség utolsó küzdelmei," 155.

THE 1825–27 DIET

Preparations for the diet included, as usual, the election of two delegates from each county. This process in Tolna and Zala Counties could well describe the general pattern followed by most of them. In Tolna, “the instructions reflected the conservative orientation of the county’s leadership” and encompassed such demands as convoking the diet once every three years, the king’s prolonged stay in Hungary, and a commerce that was freed from cumbersome impediments. Zala’s instructions, quite similar to the one in Tolna, were likewise based on grievances.⁶⁴

Not surprisingly then, the nineteenth century chronicler characterized this diet not so much as one that brought forth new laws, but rather as dedicated to the “heroic defense of the constitution.” A twentieth century appraisal essentially endorsed this view in more contemporary language.⁶⁵ This apparent uniformity did not preclude harsh feelings directed at the aristocrats of the Upper Chamber, not for their conservative views that most of their counterparts in the Lower Chamber shared, but for their presumed indifference to the objectives of cultural nationalism, particularly to the use of Magyar. Certain pasquills were viscerally savage about individual aristocrats, some obscenely so. One pasquill called the aristocrats “a disaster for the country,” and a document made a similar charge against the Catholic prelates, sitting in the Upper Chamber, calling them unpatriotic and “mediocre and enervated as well.”⁶⁶

A delegate from Győr County, Miklós Kolosváry, offered a succinct summary of the conservative position. Referring to the Pragmatic

64 Sándorné Braun, “Tolna vármegye és a rendi országgyűlések 1807–1847” [The county of Tolna and the feudal diets 1807–1847], *Tanulmányok Tolna Megye Történetéből*, vol. 8 (1978), 132; Alajos Degré, “Zala megye reformkori követ utasításai” [The instructions to deputies to the Age of Reform Diets from Zala County], *Levéltári Közlemények* 44–5 (1974), 155.

65 Kolos Vaszar, *Adatok az 1825-iki Országgyűlés történetéhez* [Data to the history of the 1825 diet] (Győr, 1883), 1; Kosáry, 235.

66 “The language of discussion in the Upper Chamber,” wrote Mihály Horváth, “was Latin, because, regretfully, only a handful among our Germanized aristocrats could handle Hungarian.” Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 150; Abafi, “Magyar pasquillok,” 151, 153; Sándor Kolosváry, “Az 1825/26-iki Országgyűlésről” [About the 1825–1826 diet] Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, Kézirattár [Manuscript Archive], Fol. Hung.2441.

Sanction, Kolosváry urged the king to keep his oath, because “we are independent and do not wish to be ruled like the other parts [of the Monarchy]. We do have a constitution, which means everything to us.” Even delegates who numbered among the relatively more enlightened at past diets, Count József Dessewffy and Pál Felsőbüki Nagy, for instance, supported this position.⁶⁷

Discussions remained within the broad framework of cultural nationalist objectives with various fluctuations. Pest County, for example, put emphasis on a planned Hungarian Academy of Sciences and on a national theater, to be established in Pest.⁶⁸ The tone of discussions at the diet were quite provincial and often racist or xenophobic, with negative comments directed mostly at Jews, Greeks, and Germans. Ferenc Péchy, a delegate from Pest County, believed that “bastardization of the country’s population would incur the contempt of other nations.” His solution to that problem was to beg the king to live in Hungary from time to time, which, he thought, would reflect well on Hungarians and make the use of Magyar more common. He, along with the influential Tamás Ragályi, also suggested, the eradication of Latin. István Németszeghi of Mosony County went so far as to object to the education of students from Hungary at foreign universities, because this would take money away from the country and, consequently “further curtail our liberty.”⁶⁹

Pál Felsőbüki Nagy of Vas County was the sole exception to the rule, not because he was a liberal, far from it. Unlike his fellow delegates, he alone publicly expressed concern for the serfs, just as he had done in 1807. In the still fearful atmosphere of the times, Countess Adél Zichy, the wife of royal administrator and later Lord Lieutenant of Barcs County, Count János Keglevich, was reminded of the French Revolution by the *pasquills* attacking the aristocrats. A speech by Nagy, she thought, incited to a revolution; she called Nagy “abhorrent!” The Palatine wisely counseled the countess to ignore Nagy.⁷⁰

67 Vaszary, *Adatok az 1825-iki Országgyűlés történetéhez*, 42–3, 51, 63.

68 Kerényi, *Pest vármegye irodalmi élete*, 36–7.

69 Vaszary, *Adatok az 1825-iki Országgyűlés történetéhez*, 67, 102, 94.

70 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 171; Vaszary, *Adatok az 1825-iki Országgyűlés történetéhez*, 70; József Ostor (ed.), *Gróf Keglevich Jánosné Zichy Adél grófnő naplója a reformkorból* [The diary of Countess Adél Zichy from the Age of Reform] (Budapest, 1938), 65, 71, 60, 39.

The tangible results of the diet and the resolutions of commissions that followed the diet's closing were both meager. According to András Gergely and Andor Csizmadia, the conservative majorities in those commissions assured that not much was changed; the status quo was only slightly modified. The one substantial reform transformed the free sale of serfs' land into transactions resembling those used for normal landed property. According to László Tengelyi, this action, rather than the conservative trend, dominated the commissions.⁷¹

The literati were not the only ones who became disappointed in the diet, because a few of the delegates themselves grew equally disillusioned. "This diet cannot result in anything good," Dessewffy wrote to Kazinczy on September 30, 1826, adding that "it would be better to fall asleep for a few years and wake up only then." Széchenyi confided to his diary that defending "an anti-liberal constitution is not a noble task... when discussions turn to the serfs, one hears such opinions and stupidity that should belong to the empires of the Tunguz or the Bashkirs."⁷²

Beyond such disillusionments, cultural nationalism itself was reaching a critical phase. The primary objective of cultural nationalists everywhere was "moral regeneration of the historic community." While they succeeded in reaching many of their goals, such as improving the national language, they failed in their primary objective to transform their respective societies through culture. As an educated elite, they had only a limited impact on their countries' social and political leadership, let alone on the population at large.⁷³ Some cultural nationalists were coming to realize that elevating their nation could not be

71 András Gergely, "A rendszeres bizottsági munkálatok szerepe a magyar reformmozgalom kibontakozásában" [The works of committees in the unfolding of the Age of Reform], *Tiszatáj* 28, no. 6 (1974), 37; Andor Csizmadia, *A magyar közigazgatás fejlődése a XVIII. századtól a tanácsrendszer létrejöttéig* [The development of the Hungarian public administration from the 18th century to the regime of councils] (Budapest, 1976); László Tengelyi, "A rendszeres bizottságok úrbéri munkálatainak egybevetése" [The comparison between works of the commissions on matters that relate to the serfs], *Acta Iuventum* 1 (1978), 22–6.

72 Quoted in Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 183; September 21, 1825, *Széchenyi*, 197.

73 John Hutchinson, "Cultural nationalism and moral regeneration" in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), 124–5.

accomplished unless they left their ivory towers and become engaged not in traditional county or national politics, but in new ways that would usher in genuine reforms. Although interest in politics considerably increased after 1823—Toldy remembered that, in his circle of literati, “we talked about the arts and sometimes about politics, especially so from 1823 on”⁷⁴—most of them did remain on the sidelines. The one who had thrown himself headlong into politics was Ferenc Kölcsey.

In Ferenc Kulin’s opinion, Kölcsey, with his superb and all-embracing intellect, simultaneously absorbed the spirits of Antiquity, Christianity, the Enlightenment, and German idealism. By the mid-1820s, in his essay “Nemzeti hagyományok,” Kölcsey expressed interest in folklore, asserting that “the original spark for national poetry can be found in folk songs.”⁷⁵ Such an interest reflected a gradually evolving concern for the peasantry. As a landowner, Kölcsey was aware of their situation. Nor could he escape the financial difficulties that confronted most landowners. Furthermore, he could not but witness the indifference toward his country’s grave problems at the diet, and finally, he had to come to terms with the inadequacy of pursuing cultural objectives alone. Consequently, he entered the administration of his county in 1829 on a new note. “To rule over servants is a misfortune,” he said in a brief speech, but “to reach a high position among free men is the best reward of personal merit.”⁷⁶

This transformation was not free from pain, because it did not take place in a vacuum, but in a country where the vast majority of noblemen were still laboring under the illusion that nothing of importance was going wrong. This explains the periodic despair reflected in the literati’s negative comments on the diet. Kölcsey himself vacillated between using harsh words to compare the cowardice and apathy of his own times with the country’s heroic past. Yet, in his poem “Huszt,” he exhorted his compatriots to work hard, so that the country would then shine.⁷⁷

74 Ferenc Toldy, “Irodalmi társasköreink emlékezete Bessenyeitől Kisfaludy Károly köréig” [The memories of literary associations from Bessenyei to the circle of Károly Kisfaludy], *Budapesti Szemle* 15 (1875), 10.

75 Kulin, *Nemzet és sokaság*, 10; *ibid.*, “Nemzeti hagyományok,” 60.

76 Quoted in Benedek Jancsó, “Kölcsey Ferenc megyei tisztviselőisége” [The holding of a county-office by Ferenc Kölcsey], *Hazánk* 2, no. 5 (1884), 328.

77 Jancsó, *Kölcsey válogatott munkái*, 62, 65.

The crisis of cultural nationalism did not lead to its demise. On the contrary, cultural nationalism experienced at least a partial rebirth in a more mature form. The major shot in the arm, assuring the strong survival of cultural nationalism, was the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in which Count István Széchenyi played a critical role. At the November 3, 1825 session of the diet, and contrary to later legends, Széchenyi offered one year of his income not to create the Academy as such, but to found an institution dedicated to the promotion of the Magyar language.⁷⁸ Still, this was a magnanimous gesture, which prompted other aristocrats to contribute. By 1830, the Academy was functioning. Its various activities not only kept alive the objectives of cultural nationalism, but also enabled some of its practitioners to avoid the tumult of politics and to pursue their goals in the generally refined, though at times murderously competitive, atmosphere of the Academy. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, cultural and political nationalisms were running parallel, and individuals could and did make a choice. Kölcsey wholeheartedly threw himself into politics, while someone like Ferenc Toldy concentrated on working within and for the Academy.

As the 1820s were coming to a close, liberalism finally made its gradual, though still tentative, appearance in Hungary. Certainly, the country possessed a longstanding liberal tradition, but what had emanated from this was ambiguous. István Kultsár was a cultural nationalist par excellence, but in 1806 he vowed to preserve the country's "eight-hundred-years constitution," which he connected to the nation's strength.⁷⁹ This retrograde faith in the liberal tradition was in fact obstructing genuine reforms. Although cultural nationalists were liberal in the sense of promoting freedom of thought and religious freedom, they could not in any meaningful sense be called liberals as long as they did not wean themselves away from Werbőczy's *Tripartitum*, defending the country's social and economic structure. Not even the support by some diehard traditionalists of commerce and industry had made them into such, because this merely revealed the incongruity of their beliefs.

78 András Jolsvai, "‘Írók Akadémiája.’ A megalapítástól a megalakulásig" ["The Academy of Writers": From the founding to its realization], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 93, nos. 5–6 (1989), 605, 625.

79 Taxner-Tóth, "A világ változásai a *Hazai és Külföldi Tudósításokban*," 378.

A willingness to modernize certain aspects of the economy without touching the principal agrarian sector left these traditionalists dangling in an unrealistic and unrealizable limbo. In order for them to make that leap into meaningful liberalism, they had to cross the gulf separating nobles from serfs and to examine how Hungary could proceed in line with western developments. A more flexible interpretation of the country's liberal heritage aided this process. Rather than looking at this heritage as an unmovable justification of the *status quo*, it could be regarded as a springboard, as an opportunity, indeed a patriotic obligation, to extend rights, hitherto restricted only to nobles, to the entire male population at large. In this scheme, the nobility would retain its leadership, while the sense of permanence would be modified, but not abandoned.

Last but not least, what had also propelled this process forward was the *Zeitgeist* of the times, what Kazinczy called in a letter to Dessewffy "the philosophical spirit governing Europe." Following the teachings of Kant and the philosophy of German idealism, "individual virtue and inner freedom were linked to statecraft, meaning that laws would be insufficient unless they embodied virtue,"⁸⁰ not in the self-contained classical, but in the modern public-spirited sense. This approach would be incompatible with the reflexive defense of a law, passed in the sixteenth century and based on a medieval mindset.

Kölcsey pioneered this new approach, but the leader who gave new directions to the country and played a major role in launching the Age of Reform was Count István Széchenyi.

80 Kazinczy to Dessewffy, July 24, 1810, in Gábor Kazinczy (ed.), *Gróf Dessewffy József bizalmas levelezése Kazinczy Ferencce, 1793–1831* [The confidential correspondence between Count József Dessewffy and Ferenc Kazinczy, 1793–1831], 3 volumes (Pest, 1860–64), 1: 148–9; Szekfü, *Rövid magyar történet*, 294.

CHAPTER 6

The Hungarian Age of Reform in the 1830s

THE EARLY-MID 1830S: THE TRIUMPHANT YEARS OF COUNT ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI

Count István Széchenyi was the son of Count Ferenc Széchenyi, the venerable reform-minded patriot and generous benefactor in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His son, born in 1791, enjoyed all the advantages of an aristocratic upbringing. Serving in the cavalry of the Monarchy's army during the Napoleonic wars, the young count distinguished himself in several battles, including the critical one at Leipzig in 1813. After the cessation of hostilities, he lived the life expected from someone rich and privileged, a life of ease, levity, and occasional recklessness. This only gradually started to change during the first half of the 1820s, when he, in the company of Baron Miklós Wesselényi, toured Western Europe. England made an especially lasting impression on him. He admired most its constitutional life and public spirit.¹

Posterity is very fortunate to possess the diary that Count István Széchenyi started writing in 1814, stopping only a few days before his suicide in 1860. There is no space in this book to analyze his fascinating diary in detail, but even a quick perusal through the second half of the 1820s would give the reader a definite idea about Széchenyi's personality and views on a variety of topics. A late nineteenth century writer, Béla Grünwald, was already commenting about the apparent contradictions in the diary, "passion and cool calculation, faith and despair, weariness of life and tireless activism." This observation was no coincidence as Grünwald himself was a man rent with inner conflicts.²

1 Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi*, 107.

2 Béla Grünwald, *Az új Magyarország. Széchenyi István* [The new Hungary: István Széchenyi] (Budapest, 1890), 7–8; Mihály Lackó, *Halál Párizsban: Grünwald Béla történész művei és betegségei* [Death in Paris: The Historian Béla Grünwald's works and illnesses] (Budapest, 1986). Széchenyi started writing a diary in 1814, stopped in September 1848, and resumed doing it from October 2 1859 through April 1, 1860. He committed suicide on April 8th.

According to András Gergely, Széchenyi's brutal openness makes the diary reflective in the frankest possible subjective manner, making it credible not only as part of history but also as a text with literary merits. Another observer, János Barta, called attention to Széchenyi's "perfectionism," which partially explains his inner conflicts, because gaps between often unrealistic or unrealizable goals and accomplishments were bound to occur. Domokos Kosáry claimed that there was no inner split within Széchenyi, the writer of the diary, who had often expressed very practical ideas, and the highly-strung creative man, filled with doubts and inner tensions. Kosáry viewed Széchenyi not as someone with a split personality, but, rather, as a unique and singular individual,³ although quotations from his diary suggest that he may have suffered from a bipolar disorder.

Extricating the principal ideas from the rich texture of the diary reveals two major currents. One concerns Széchenyi's own inner life; the other involves his problematic, but, at the end, promising relationship with his country and nation. Széchenyi, throughout his life, was plagued by devastating self-doubts, aggravated by real or perceived insults by his enemies and, on occasion, even by his friends. His suffering was real, but the additional psychological burden of a byronesque romantic pose that carried *Weltschmerz* as a badge of honor should not be discounted, either. Last but not least, his own facile social way of life, more typical in his earlier years but still integrated with the rest of him, led to condescension from some of his peers, who viewed him as if he were no more or other than a lightweight aristocrat. Aristocrats admittedly liked to give each other nicknames,⁴ and therefore, *Steffertl* (a German nickname for István) was not necessarily belittling. However, in the context Countess Adél Zichy used it, perhaps it was. She jotted down in her diary on October 16, 1824 that "Steffertl Széchenyi dropped by... he was in a good mood,

3 András Gergely, "Széchenyi naplói" [Széchenyi's diaries], *Tiszatáj* 34, no. 5 (1980), 51, 55; János Barta, "A Széchenyi-élmény. Utóhang a napló megjelenéséhez" [The Széchenyi-experience: Epilogue to the publication of the diaries] *Alföld* 31, no. 3 (1980), 67–8; Domokos Kosáry, "Széchenyi, a naplóíró és a történelmi személyiség" [Széchenyi, the diarist and the historical personality], *Irodalomtörténet* 61, no. 3 (1979), 502.

4 Letter of István Deák to the author, August 23, 2010.

mood, jabbering incessantly and making me laugh.”⁵ To many of his fellow aristocrats—even to Metternich—Széchenyi remained *Stefferl*. All of this was devastating to a man who was overly, indeed, neurotically sensitive. A few excerpts from his diaries may prove the validity of this statement:

General Hardenberg scolded me like I was some schoolboy ... Have I benefitted anyone by my travelling? An idiot, filled with prejudices, who has never left the country is popular, while I am completely alone! ... I am very bitter and tired of life. ... Merciful God, trample on me in your fury. ... At Ferenc Zichy's, they say all kinds of bad things about me... that essentially I have no talent. ... I live in constant agony ... I will end my life as a hermit ... I am suffering from agonizing torments, both morally and physically ... How happy I would be to put an end to my life ... I secretly cherish the thought of blowing my brains out. ... I feel isolated. I hear about lunches and dinners to which I have not been invited. I need a gun now! I am unsuited to do anything, as if I were a paralytic ... I am 38 years old. I have wasted my life away.

His tortuous and often unconsummated love affairs added to his suffering. He registered every move and glance and every sign of reciprocity, or the lack of it, from the women with whom he fell in love. “Love guides my actions,” he wrote, “and will do so in the future. Some will take me for a lunatic or a stupid man, contemptible by most. Only a few will appreciate me.”⁶

At first glance, his relationship to Hungary appears to have mirrored his morbid, self-tormenting behavior. Forcefully critical of conditions and naming the country “old and degenerate,” he described the

5 József Östör, “Gróf Keglevich Jánosné Zichy Adél grófnő naplói a reformkorszakból” [The diaries of Countess Adél Zichy from the Age of Reform], *Budapesti Szemle* 66 (1938), 22.

6 September 27, 1825, *Széchenyi*, 401; November 22, 1825, *ibid.*, 427; February 4, 1826, *ibid.*, 450; March 9, 1826, *ibid.*, 459; April 10, 1826, *ibid.*, 464; April 13, 1826, *ibid.*, 465; November 26, 1826, *ibid.*, 495; April 24, 1827, *ibid.*, 512; April 26, 1828, *ibid.*, 543; January 5, 1829, *ibid.*, 583; September 21, 1829, *ibid.*, 613; June 6, 1826, *ibid.*, 473.

the absurd situation of Hungarians not noticing faults, while, at the same time, being dissatisfied. He had a very low opinion of some of his compatriots, calling them “impertinent and boorish.” He even criticized his good friend, Miklós Wesselényi, for his hypocrisy, for championing the common people yet mistreating his own servant, and he found fault with his own class, the aristocrats, calling them unworthy of a constitution and of liberty. His morbidity was most conspicuous in his frequent characterizations of Hungary as dead or dying. The vision of national extinction was the ultimate expression of a romantic “Angst,” and Széchenyi, already inclined to morbidity in his personal life, carried this projection to its most extreme limits in his diaries, where references to his nation’s death and dying abound: “I am suffering because my country is dying”; “I am seeing clearly that I have been working on reviving a corpse—I cannot stand to be part of a decomposing body”; “Every day I see it more and more that Herder was right—the Hungarian nation will soon cease to exist.”⁷

Yet, critical differences separated his personal and public visions. Unlike the former, where his pessimistic self-doubts and agonizing were overwhelming, Széchenyi could be analytical and even occasionally optimistic about Hungary. In one case, he brilliantly examined the difference between innovation and the passion to reform. He claimed that the line separating those two was fuzzy and that the second could lead to unwelcome results, arguing that the fear of replacing something good with something mediocre could paralyze reformers and deprive them of the strength to rise above old habits and prejudices. This observation appears to confirm Széchenyi’s cautious conservatism, which coexisted with his liberal impulses. In another analysis, however, his understandable lack of historical perspective led him to a mistaken conclusion. He asserted that a country that had “privileges” and “one-sided liberties” would have a harder time to advance and have a liberal constitution than a country that had none.⁸

Széchenyi’s general mental disposition makes his genuine expressions of hope and optimism even more remarkable. A few days after he had implored God to trample on him in a fury, he joyfully remarked

7 August 28, 1827, *Széchenyi*, 523; September 8, 1827, *ibid.*, 525; June 20, 1829, *ibid.*, 595.

8 August 11, 1825, *ibid.*, 382–3; January 4, 1827, *ibid.*, 501.

that he was finally feeling the pleasure of having become influential in his own country and that his influence was bound to grow further in time. Széchenyi was actively involved in enhancing that influence, writing, at one point, that “my time, my talent and my fortune belong to my country.” Although Széchenyi was certain that the envy and ill will of his adversaries would eventually cut him down, he nevertheless wrote that “All I had started will progress. Every seed I have sown will blossom into fruits” and that “I shall think and work day and night until the end of my life.”⁹

Indeed, the number of his practical projects, starting in the second half of the 1820s, grew by leaps and bounds. Initiatives from this early period include the first steps toward the founding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the establishment of the National Casino, promotion of horse races, and preparations for a bridge connecting Buda and Pest, as well as a national Hungarian theater. For what larger aim? His books, published in the early 1830s, filled out the details, but whatever his reservations, mostly from later years, as well as some of his tactical political moves, Széchenyi was looking to England as a model, firmly rooted in an aristocratic whig, rather than in a liberal, tradition.¹⁰ He observed with resignation the proceedings of the Hungarian diet of 1825–27. Writing to Wesselényi, he remarked that “things here [in Pozsony] flow slowly, sadly, and sleepily... but the human mind is forging ahead and the time will come, even if slowly, when the chains of mankind will be broken up. If that belief would not inspire and comfort me, [my] sorrow, low spirits, and pains would kill me.”¹¹

The gist of his political credo, entrusted to the diaries, included his wish to educate the youth “so that they become citizens, more so than we contemporaries, endowed with Reason, Morality, and Wisdom.” He exclaimed in 1826, “how few people know what a constitution is!” Criticizing the king, in the privacy of his diary, Széchenyi jotted down

9 February 7, 1826, *ibid.*, 451; November 12, 1826, *ibid.*, 492; November 16, 1826, *ibid.*, 494; December 10, 1826, *ibid.*, 497.

10 Letter of September 17, 2010 by R.J.W. Evans to the author.

11 Széchenyi's letter to Baron Miklós Wesselényi, September 16, 1826, László Szabó Bártfai (ed.), *Adatok Gróf Széchenyi István és kora történetéhez, 1808–1860* [Data of the history of Count István Széchenyi and his era 1808–1860] (Budapest, 1943), I: 65.

jotted down that “the crux of our curse is our sovereign’s ignorance about the representative system,” only to add a few words of conservative caution. “We now wish to put an end to lethargy in a flash, [something] that has been in evidence throughout his entire reign,” he lamented. Széchenyi, echoing the Enlightenment, wrote a year later that the “struggle between the development of a citizen mentality and darkness is becoming more and more manifest. The Jesuits are revived in order to counterbalance the liberals. Woe to me!” These last few words appear to project his realistic fear of becoming stranded between what he perceived to be the forces of progress and of reaction. Indeed, Széchenyi’s unflinching loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty caused Pál Felsőbüki Nagy to compare him to the hated advocate of royal absolutism, the Viennese censor, Anton Wilhelm Gustermann, while Széchenyi thought that Nagy resembled Werbőczy. Both characterizations were unfair, and they signaled the worsening polarization among politically active Hungarians.¹²

Although the second half of the 1820s witnessed Széchenyi’s growing interest in easing his nation’s backwardness in a variety of ways, the real breakthroughs occurred in the early 1830s, when he published three books in quick succession: *Hitel* (“Credit”), *Világ* (“Light”), and *Stádium* (“Phase”). The most influential among them was the first. It primarily exposed the shortcomings of agriculture in Hungary, but it went beyond that, starting with its dedication to the country’s women. Although the title of the book suggested an economic theme, certain moral imperatives followed from the concept of credit. For Széchenyi these imperatives included “honesty, the sacredness of the given word, [and] uprightness of actions,” and women embodied what was “Noble and Beautiful and what lifted up Human-kind.” In charge of “bringing up young children and educating them to be good citizens,” women served as “the guardian angels of civic Virtue and Nationality, which would not develop but would fade away without them.”¹³ All this was more wishful thinking than reality—most educated women still preferred to speak and read German, rather

12 November 27, 1825, *Széchenyi*, 428; September 9, 1826, *ibid.*, 487; July 12, 1827, *ibid.*, 519; December 3, 1827, *ibid.*, 528.

13 Quoted in Gyula Szekfű (ed.), *A mai Széchenyi. Eredeti szövegek Széchenyi István munkáiból* [Széchenyi of today: Original texts from the works of István Széchenyi] (Budapest, 1935), 24.

than Hungarian—but Széchenyi's program of moral regeneration was predicated upon optimistic wish fulfillment.

More than any specific proposal in this work, Széchenyi's main purpose centered on persuading his fellow countrymen to accept the idea of reform as the sole path to a better future. To him, "feudalism was morally wrong, made no sense in the modern world, and hurt even those who were supposed to benefit from it."¹⁴ This is why he wanted obsolete feudal practices, including the *robot*, the *ius aviticum* (the prohibition of transferring noble land to others as long as a family member—in the broadest sense of that word—laid claim to it), and the *jus fiscalitatis* (the right of the royal treasury to expropriate noble lands in cases of treason or the extinction of the family line) to be abandoned, because the double burdens of indebtedness and the inalienability of noble lands were proving to be ruinous to the landowners themselves.

In order to transcend mental obstacles, a ruthless process of introspection was necessary, because, above all, prejudices and national conceit had to be overcome. Széchenyi punctured the latter without any hesitation. "True, that our country is not fashionable, and foreigners barely know that we exist," he wrote. "As if we were sitting at the bottom of a deep well, [because] none of our spiritual or material goods have any reputation [abroad]... Many mawkish flatteries and unlimited self-adulation have done more harm to us, notwithstanding their good intentions, than what our enemies could have done with all their skill."¹⁵ What counted most were people educated in the broad sense of the word, who should recognize their potential in a society based on true and trusted religious foundations. Although Széchenyi "as a politician emancipated himself from all clerical partiality and tended to advocate liberal principles, he was a romantic, whose diaries are full of religious yearning and who proclaimed a kind of spiritual rebirth among the Magyars."¹⁶

Széchenyi concluded *Hitel* in an enthusiastically rousing manner:

Nothing stands still in the world, so only Hungary should stay put and motionless? Wouldn't that be ridiculous? For God's sake, let us open our eyes and use our brains. We must move,

¹⁴ Barany, "The age of royal absolutism," 192.

¹⁵ Quoted in Szekfü, *A mai Széchenyi*, 107.

¹⁶ Evans, "Religion and nation in Hungary," 152.

whether we like it or not, and unless we allow ourselves to be impeded, let us move forward! ... I hate extreme [solutions], and I am a friend of reconciliation and of unifying various factions. I opt for the possible good in the middle, rather than for some imaginary pie in the sky. But I am not looking back, as so many of my compatriots do... and I do not worry over what has transpired in the past; rather, I am concerned with the future, with what we could become. The past is not within our powers, but the future is... Many think Hungary was—I would like to think that it will be.¹⁷

Although most controversies about Széchenyi largely concern his later career, some do involve this seemingly glorious earlier phase of his life. Two eminent Hungarian historians claim that Széchenyi, for all his positive contributions, was not unique, but simply part of a progressive cohort. “Széchenyi did not awaken his nation,” László Csorba wrote, adding that “the nation was already awake,” as he referred to such pioneers of reform as Balásházy, Pethe, Nagyváthy and literati such as Kazinczy and Kölcsey. István Orosz shares this view. In his opinion, “Széchenyi did not shake up a nation asleep; rather, he merely kept up with public opinion. *Hitel* was not the initiator of the reform movement but acted as its midwife.” Most other historians, myself included, would respectfully disagree. I concur with Gyula Szekfű, who seconded János Váczy’s earlier assessment that “Széchenyi’s circumstances, his name, fortune, rich experience and wide intellectual horizon, predestined him to play an authoritative role.” Echoing this view, Szekfű wrote that “in that ossified society, only a very prosperous aristocrat, who descended from an old family, could expect to receive a hearing.” In Robert J.W. Evans’ judgment, “rapid change would have come anyway; but he catalyzed it, and gave it its distinctive configuration.”¹⁸ What helped Széchenyi along were his sharp, cogent

17 Quoted in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 174.

18 László Csorba, *Széchenyi István* (Budapest, 1991), 68; István Orosz (ed.), *Széchenyi és kortársai. Válogatott tanulmányok a reformkorról* [Széchenyi and his contemporaries: Selected studies on the Age of Reform] (Debrecen, 2000), 12; János Váczy, “Count István Széchenyi,” *Hazánk* 3 (1885), 245; Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 295; Robert J.W. Evans, “Széchenyi and Austria” in Tamás Magyarics and Miklós Lojók (eds.), *Emlékkönyv Frank Tibor 60. születésnapjára* [Memorial volume on the occasion of Tibor Frank’s 60th birthday] (Budapest, 2008), 57.

arguments and passionate phrases. Their quality was quite simply not matched by anything that his predecessors had been able to muster.

All of this was the more remarkable, because not even the publication of a book, certainly successful in its nationwide impact, put a stop to his painful self doubts. A few excerpts from Széchenyi's diary demonstrate the extent to which he continued to be plagued by agonizing anxieties: "They start to revile my book. They say nothing about it. Eötvös, reading its title, thought that it was a mystical novel... Hungary is completely dead... Whatever I am doing for it, it is like embalming a corpse... [In Croatia] the flourishing region is in sharp contrast to the flooded areas and uncultivated lands of 'extra Hungariam, etc.', and it is not destiny but utter stupidity that keeps us in our degradation."¹⁹

According to László Csorba, what really infuriated many readers was their belief that Széchenyi, instead of revealing the truth, defiled his nation. I would argue that a book filled with groundless calumnies would not have had such an impact.²⁰ It is also true that, to noblemen reared in the tradition of Hungary's unique qualities and superiority, any comment taken as derogatory undoubtedly sounded like so much sacrilege, which does explain some of the vituperation hurled at Széchenyi. Some accused him of "amassing insulting villainy" and even of "inciting the peasants by exploiting their envy." In addition, some among the untitled nobility had a noticeably skeptical attitude towards an aristocrat. "His book was barely read by anyone in Sáros [County]," Pulszky remembered, because "the highlanders thought that counts should write about horses, a subject they know, but not about politics, which should be left to the more practical judges of the county courts."²¹

The most serious work criticizing *Hitel* was Count József Dessewffy's "Taglalat" published in 1831. Dessewffy, a close friend of Kazinczy, was by no means a reactionary aristocrat. On the contrary, he was a man

19 February 10, 1830, *Széchenyi*, 629; February 28, 1830, *ibid.*, 630; April 12, 1830, *ibid.*, 635; May 1, 1830, *ibid.*, 636; June 28, 1830, *ibid.*, 647.

20 Csorba, *Széchenyi István*, 74.

21 Quoted in Béla Iványi-Grünwald, *Gróf Széchenyi István Hitelje, a "Taglalat" és a Hitellel foglalkozó kisebb iratok* [Count István Széchenyi's *Hitel*, the "Taglalat," and smaller writings on *Hitel*], Budapest, 1930, 256; Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 64.

of extraordinary erudition, steeped not only in the Classics, but also in contemporary German, French, and English literature and philosophy. Furthermore, Dessewffy was often extremely critical of Hungarian domestic conditions, although, unlike Széchenyi, he placed the blame on Vienna, rather than on the Hungarian nobility. In a letter to Kazinczy, he bitterly complained about the capricious injustices that censorship inflicted on writers. His pamphlet defending the freedom of the press, also published in 1831, attracted the attention of Pulszky and his friends. As a landowner himself, deeply in debt, Dessewffy had some sympathy for reforms. As George Barany has pointed out, some areas of agreement between Széchenyi and Dessewffy did exist. For instance, Dessewffy was willing to concede on abandoning the absolute refusal of most nobles to offer financial contributions to common expenses. He was quite complimentary about Széchenyi in a letter to Kazinczy, stating that he merely wanted to counter what he regarded as Széchenyi's exaggerations and his carrying matters to extremes.²²

Nevertheless and for all his erudition, Dessewffy was firmly anchored in the traditional noble universe. In a letter to Kazinczy, he defended Hungary's constitution and stated that, as long as Hungary was governed by the monarch, it was a colony. Dessewffy had no wish to disturb the equilibrium that existed in his mind between the propertyless masses and the landowners. In the "Taglalat" itself, he essentially repeated the same arguments of his cautious conservatism. "True," he wrote, "that nothing lasts forever, and this refers to a constitution as well, but, from that, it does not follow that laws should necessarily be changed... One can build a house to last for a long time, especially if it is a well-built house, and the 'tower of St. Stephen' has stood up to challenge... We should not magnify our faults, but gradually improve upon them. ... [I]t is impossible to eliminate centuries-old roots..."²³

More than any specific point, the mindset separating the two aristocrats was wide and unbridgeable. The repudiation of *Hitel* by those nobles who were attached to both the defense of their privileges and

22 Dessewffy to Kazinczy, January 31, 1822, *Kazinczy*, 28; Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 59; Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi*, 216; July 27, 1830, Dessewffy to Kazinczy, Kazinczy (ed.), *Gróf Dessewffy József bizalmas levelezése Kazinczy Ferencsel*, 3: 382.

23 Quoted by Béla Iványi-Grünwald in *Gróf Széchenyi István*, 603, 622, 640, 641.

their exalted view of Hungary and Hungarian society was expected, although Count Dessewffy's presence among them indicates that their group was by no means homogeneous. On the other hand, the identities of those who came out in support of Széchenyi's book were, in part, surprising. The approval of the handful of liberals such as Bajza or Kölcsey was most likely, but even a few moderate conservatives, such as János Kis, Dániel Berzsenyi, and János Sréter gave their unqualified support to. The cultural nationalists had a sense of Hungary's backwardness, relative to the west, so it was not odd that one of them, János Kis, felt as if reading *Hitel* "transported him to another, more cultured country." Although Sréter thought "that old institutions contained more elements of freedom than new-fangled artificial theories from which so-called constitutions have been fabricated," he acknowledged Széchenyi's courage in telling his nation some "bitter facts." Finally, what pleased Berzsenyi was the variety found in the book, and he approvingly wrote to Széchenyi himself about "the noise [created by the book's publication], which shows life" and implored the author "to continue with dispensing further truths." Thus, the combination of strong arguments and romantic pathos made an impact on some moderate conservatives, as well.²⁴

In *Világ*, Széchenyi responded to Dessewffy by describing again the country's condition as dismal and emphasizing the centrifugal forces that were tearing all the estates, social classes, religious denominations, towns, and counties apart and against one another. He drew the conclusion that "palliative measures would be worthless," comparing them to drugs whose effectiveness would fade in time. The worship of a glorious national past was another illusion, Széchenyi claimed, adding that "ruins of old castles show nothing, but point to petty lords and poor kings." If Hungarians wanted to change non-Hungarians into Magyars, "first the Hungarians would have to change so their examples would be fit to be imitated." According to Széchenyi, Hungarians "are still a childish people amounting to nothing, but they can evolve into anything they want to be, because of their inner spiritual and physical strength. They have two enemies: prejudice and conceit." Széchenyi characterized his faith in a better future as a dream, but

24 Kis, *Kis János szuperintendens emlékezései életéből*, 2; János Sréter, *Visszaemlékezések* [Reminiscences] (Buda, 1842), 2, 5; Dániel Berzsenyi to Count István Széchenyi in 1830. Merényi, (ed.), *Berzsenyi Dániel összes művei*, 485–6.

nevertheless listed his practical reforms—horse-racing, the Academy, the casinos, the production of Hungarian wines, the promotion of commerce, and the building of a bridge between Buda and Pest—as steps necessary for realizing his dream.²⁵

In *Stádium*, Széchenyi became quite explicit about furthering a program which, if realized, would have dismantled the feudal system in Hungary. Although he did not mention emancipation, his demand to “liberate the peasantry politically,” that is, to incorporate them as full-fledged members of the nation, would necessarily lead to emancipation. Széchenyi believed that the landowners were also burdened by the impracticalities embedded in the feudal system and that noble privileges presented obstacles to production.²⁶ These ideas foreshadowed a sense of reciprocity and common identity of interest between the peasants and the landowners, which later became the principal leitmotiv during Hungary’s Age of Reform.

A dreadful cholera epidemic, causing 250,000 fatalities and mostly devastating the country’s northeastern counties, led to peasant riots, which the military crushed. To the reformers, this episode signaled the urgency of emancipation, but the crisis made the bulk of the nobility even more recalcitrant about defending their privileges.²⁷

If this were the case, can we really talk about the emergence of a new liberal paradigm, essentially replacing the old feudal one? In other words, was it true that “the Hungarian liberal movement emerged with great force... as a result of the interplay of unexpected economic, social, and political developments?”²⁸ While liberals had undoubtedly made gains by the early to middle of the 1830s, this had not happened in a rush. Rather, the development of liberalism in Hungary was a gradual penetration and the slow, incremental formation of a particular sub-culture, added to the already existing ones in Hungary, the Baroque, the Biedermeyer, Classicism, Romanticism, and Conservatism. This mixture of sub-cultures, with its components competing and

25 Quoted in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 178–85, 188, 188, 189, 201–23, 226–8, 230–6.

26 Ibid., 240, 246–7, 258, 265.

27 Kosáry, 265; Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 304.

28 István Schlett, *A magyar politikai gondolkodás története* [The history of political thought in Hungary] (Budapest, 1999) 2: 15; András Gergely, *Reform and Revolution 1830–1849* (New York, 2009), 30; hereafter cited as Gergely.

co-existing with one another in a variety of ways, continued throughout the entire span of the Age of Reform.

Political polarization was an inherent part of this cultural proliferation. On the most conservative side of the political spectrum, the writer and poet József Pónori-Thewrewk represented ultra-reactionary views. In a book published in 1833, he accused “foreign liars” and their Hungarian acolytes of damaging the country and succumbing to the adulation of the present, catering to “[unnecessary] changes and vacillations.” The author characterized this as a “dreadful and contagious disease,” spread by dangerous books, as well as greedy and morally corrupt journalists who perpetrated much of their damage in coffee-houses. The immature young were especially exposed to this “disease,” immersed in “religious indifference and futile cosmopolitanism.” What stood against all these were the wisdom of the king, censorship, and the eight-hundred-year-old constitution. “God bless ‘extra Hungariam non est vita!’ We should resist the ‘writers’ despotism’ and the ‘political and moral cholera’ spreading to the country.”²⁹

Although Pónori-Thewrewk was surely representative of a large group of noblemen, a somewhat modified, but fundamentally conservative, approach typified others. “Freedom of the Press,” an anonymous pamphlet published in 1831, acknowledged the right of people to full, but not limitless, freedom. Freedom should not be allowed if it infringed on “modesty,” “propriety,” “honesty,” “truth,” “piety,” “moderation,” “goodness,” and “kindness.” The pamphlet argued that “a good and honest man would not even contemplate transgressing freedom’s limitations.” The author of two books, published in 1833 and 1834 respectively, followed a similar logic. To Lőrincz Nyitra-Zerdahelyi’s mind, the country contained several mixed approaches, and it was necessary to find the most appropriate one. “There are many bad old ways and good new ones,” Nyitra-Zerdahelyi wrote, “good old ones and bad new ones; a patriot is someone who finds the best approach among them.” Yet it would be a mistake to consider this statement as neutral. In fact, the author believed that any reform should be realized only within the confines of the ancient constitution. His biggest concern was

29 József Pónori-Thewrewk, *Hazafiúi elmélkedések* [Patriotic musings] (Pozsony, 1833), 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 44, 48.

for the serfs to pay their taxes more willingly and obligingly without changing the fundamental laws.³⁰

Another point of view expressed frequent quiet resignation, mixed with occasional bitterness. Sándor Kisfaludy's correspondence in the 1830s reveal an almost willful turning away from big problems facing his country and from seeking solutions. Most of his letters dealt with his property, financial worries, and court suits, as well as matters of the theater and the Hungarian language. In one exception, his complaint about the reform of the Hungarian language may be interpreted in a broader sense as well: "The new Hungary would not be pleased with my work," Kisfaludy wrote, adding that "as long as I live, I will stay with the ways I am writing. I am not blaming innovators because they produced many good words [i.e., in the language reform], but I do condemn them for regarding and mocking those as reactionary, who, while clasping hands with them, are not precipitately rushing ahead."³¹

THE DIETS OF THE EARLY-MID 1830S: WESSELÉNYI AND SZÉCHENYI

The county assemblies, where delegates to the diets were chosen, and the diets themselves were the true battlegrounds between the vast majority who were still staunch conservatives and a gradually emerging group of liberals. The nearly insignificant role that liberals had played at the 1830 diet indicated how gradual their emergence was. This diet was not at all a "Reform Parliament,"³² but largely a continuation of diets whose principal preoccupation had been defending noble privileges and redressing grievances. This was the customary way, and Vienna was, by then, an experienced partner in a formulaic *pas de deux*. As Mihály Horváth has pointed out, the concept of liberty, held so sacred by the nobility, was firmly confined to restraining

30 Anonymous, *Sajtószabadság* [Freedom of press] (Rozsnyó, 1831), 12; Lőrincz Nyitra-Zerdahelyi, *Jó törvény, jó követ* [Good law, good delegate] (Pest, 1833), 3, 18, 4; Lőrincz Nyitra-Zerdahelyi, *Intézkedés, vagyis mit kell tenni Magyar hazánkban szegény adózó népünk fölségítésére* [Arrangement or what can we do in our Hungarian country to help our poor tax-paying people] (Pest, 1834), 5.

31 June 14, 1833, Kisfaludy to István Horvát, Angyal, *Kisfaludy Sándor minden munkái*, 8: 534.

32 Gergely, 34.

executive power and did not encompass any enlargement of rights.³³ In order to counter that, the chancellor, Ádám Reviczky employed the tactics—not new but reinforced—to lure oppositional figures to Vienna's side through generous offers of titles and offices. Furthermore, the Upper Chamber did remain conservative, if not reactionary, throughout the 1830s and 1840s, standing against all or most reforms, with only a small liberal contingent dissenting.

The remaining leaders of the opposition, including Pál Felsőbüki Nagy and Tamás Ragályi, were veterans of the previous diet. Széchenyi, with his instinctive distaste for the upheavals of politicking, stayed away for the most part. His place was taken by Baron Miklós Wesselényi, who did excel at the diet with his rhetorical brilliance, but made very little headway among his fellow aristocrats in the Upper Chamber. Noted liberals, such as Kölcsény and Ferenc Deák, were not yet present, and others who later became leaders, Ödön Beöthy and István Bezerédj, did not yet play a significant role. In 1828, Lajos Kossuth, a young lawyer from Zemplén County, who emerged as a liberal leader in the 1830s and 1840s, wrote a draft on how to prevent hunger. Although István Barta thought that he had detected the nucleus of reform in it, Mihály Lackó was closer to the truth when he viewed that draft as still composed in a traditionalist manner, well within the dominant feudal mental framework.³⁴ In addition, the international situation strongly encouraged continued attachment to the status quo. Revolutions in Paris and Brussels in 1830 conjured up old fears about the spread of revolutionary fervor and democracy, and the bulk of the Hungarian nobility shared those fears. The government's principal concern was securing the supply of recruits to the army, and therefore, discussion of the so-called *operata*, reform proposals discussed by committees following the 1825–1827 diet, was postponed. From the government's point of view, this action had the additional benefit of avoiding another area of potential conflict with members of the diet.³⁵

33 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 233.

34 István Barta, *A fiatal Kossuth* [The young Kossuth] (Budapest, 1966), 31; Mihály Lackó, *Széchenyi és Kossuth vitája* [The debate between Széchenyi and Kossuth] (Budapest, 1977), 68.

35 Orsolya Völgyesi, *Politikai-közéleti gondolkodás Békés megyében a reformkor elején. A rendszeres bizottsági munkálatok megyei vitái 1830–1832* [Political-public thinking in Békés County at the beginning of the Age of Reform: The county debates of the Permanent Committees in 1830–32] (Gyula, 2002), 13.

The fear of the delegates was out in the open. Even Pál Nagy Felsőbüki, who used to take up the defense of the serfs at previous diets, spoke about “the danger threatening our eight-hundred-year-old constitution.” A delegate from Szerém County embellished this danger by characterizing it as a “conspiracy” against the constitution. Miklós Somssich of Somogy County tried to twist this argument in order to alleviate fears by declaring that “we have nothing to worry about,” precisely because, “unlike France, Belgium, and Saxony, Hungary does have a constitution.”³⁶

The line of demarcation between conservative traditionalists and liberals was generally sharp, although not always in evidence. Unlike most aristocrats, many untitled noblemen had read Széchenyi’s books with approval. Although this experience did not necessarily transform them into fully fledged liberals, their approval of Széchenyi and his writings signified a change in their own traditional patterns of thought. This change was not yet translating into political actions, because Széchenyi himself was reluctant to engage in practical politics and because the liberal nobles largely lacked power in the various counties. For the most part, they were still relatively young in the early to mid-1830s.

At the same time, the line separating conservatives from liberals could sometimes become blurred. A contemporary writer did see the crux of the dilemma for many who were stranded between their attachment “to preserve the ancient constitution in its entirety” and their simultaneous recognition of changes in the *Zeitgeist*, which, in turn, prompted them to envisage expanding the benefits of the constitution “to all inhabitants of the country.”³⁷

This attempt at reconciling the irreconcilable was the illogical result of an understandable desire to have the best of both worlds, by retaining tradition and the sense of permanence, which had long been the source of so much reassurance, while, at the same time, trying to adjust to the fast-changing world.

36 Quoted in Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 234; *Felséges Első Ferenc Ausztriai Császár s Magyar Király Pozsony városába rendeltetett Magyarország közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve* [The proceedings of the sessions I Francis, the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary ordered to convene in Pozsony] (Pozsony, 1830), 132; quoted in Joseph Orosz, *Ungarns gesetzgebender Körper auf dem Reichstage zu Pressburg im Jahre 1830* (Leipzig, 1831), 153.

37 Sándor Bertha, *Országgyűlési tárcsa 1830-ról* [Parliamentary article from 1830] (Pest, 1843), 35.

Tamás Ragályi, a delegate from Borsod County, had played a key role as a leader of the opposition during the 1825–27 diet. He was still one of the idols of young liberals at the 1830 diet, who were largely represented not so much among the delegates themselves as among their junior associates. At the diet Ragályi proposed the eventual transfer of the diet from Pozsony to Pest, “the center of the country and of patriotism.” Yet, by then, he had begun to have grave doubts about the direction Hungary was taking. Writing to his wife in 1830, he despaired over the diet for conflicting reasons. Both the apparent immobility and also attempts to reject established traditions worried him. In time, he chose voluntary retirement from oppositional politics, a stand that Vienna honored by appointing him to a series of high offices. He was a mere passive observer by the time the diet of 1847 convened.³⁸

Antal Deák, the brother of Ferenc and a delegate from Zala County, was noted for his integrity; he was among the relatively few who had rejected Chancellor Reviczky’s offer of the title of court councilor. Even though he was a moderate member of the opposition, Deák, a man noted for his conservatism, was loyal to the dynasty. Yet, writing a letter to Sándor Kisfaludy in October, 1830, Deák was wondering whether the problems facing his country stemmed from “some of the mouldy parts” of the “ancient constitution.” He acknowledged the desire of those who had been hitherto excluded from the benefits of this constitution to become part of it. Deák appeared inclined to do away with “those mouldy parts,” especially because he was terrified that a delay of corrections would produce an elementary explosion, which could destroy the constitution itself. Tellingly, he implored Kisfaludy to keep the content of his letter confidential.³⁹

At the 1830 diet, Széchenyi’s old friend, Baron Miklós Wesselényi almost single-handedly played the role of a liberal firebrand. Born into a family of Transylvanian aristocrats in 1796, Wesselényi had a famously temperamental and autocratic father who molded the precociously smart and strong young boy, his only child who had reached adulthood, with a mixture of strictness and tender love. A conservative defense of noble privileges, albeit laced with paternalistic goodwill towards the serfs, characterized the younger Wesselényi’s political

38 Vaszary, *Adatok az 1830-iki országgyűlés történetéhez*, 52; Ilona Nyilas, *Ragályi Tamás* (Miskolc, 1934), 33, 34.

39 András Molnár, *A fiatal Deák Ferenc* [The young Ferenc Deák] (Budapest, 2003), 210–2, 222–3.

stance. During the 1820s this was gradually changing, when he became Széchenyi's travelling companion in the west, and the two of them endlessly talked about Hungary's present and future prospects.

By the time of the 1830 diet, Wesselényi fearlessly represented the still novel liberal position, saying that "the diet should not make irresponsible decisions on behalf of the common people; the army should not be used to suppress other nations; freedom of religion and freedom of conscience should be secured; it is the right of any nation to use its own language."⁴⁰ He cleverly framed his arguments so that they appeared to restore the spirit of the ancient constitution. Although his audiences were not fooled by this rhetorical twist, Wesselényi nevertheless managed to arrange publication of the *operata* and their distribution in the counties. This act compelled at least some noblemen to deal with issues of national, rather than of merely local, importance.

Over time, this process aided in the transformation of part of the opposition from a grievance-centered into a more principled liberal group, liberal in the specific Hungarian context, who were prepared to cross mentally the wide divide that separated their estate from those in bondage and to extend certain rights to the serfs, without abandoning their own "historic" claims to lead the nation. Following the diet, Wesselényi threw himself into a hectic schedule of organizing, making speeches, and conducting a widespread correspondence, to the point that he attracted the attention of the government, which became eager to prosecute him at the earliest possible moment. Even the relatively moderate chancellor, Ádám Reviczky, allegedly remarked about his activities as "sans-culotte tricks."⁴¹

Although Wesselényi's book, *Balítéletekről* ("On erroneous judgments"), published abroad in 1833, did not exert the same impact on the imagination of his contemporaries as Széchenyi's books had, it deserves attention. Not surprisingly, given their friendship, they shared many ideas. For example, Wesselényi, like Széchenyi, was convinced that "there was no greater obstacle to our progress than when writers

40 Zsolt Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa* [Miklós Wesselényi and his world] (Budapest, 1970), 56.

41 Zoltán Fónagy (ed.), *Wesselényi Miklós* (Budapest, 1998), 14; Gergely, 52; April 3, 1831, *Széchenyi*, 685.

flatter our nation so much” and sharply condemned prejudices against the peasants. Wesselényi also largely followed Széchenyi’s lead in making a connection between the national economy to Hungarians becoming more cultured in a spiritual sense, but his primary concern was not the economy. In addition to the universal contempt towards the serfs, Wesselényi listed a series of prejudices as indications of “erroneous judgments” that aristocrats held toward the untitled nobility, as well as many noblemen toward the middle classes.⁴²

Apart from his proposals on essentially freeing the serfs from their bondage, through a compulsory program of manumission with compensation, and securing for them equality before the law and even a somewhat circumscribed representation in the counties, Wesselényi advocated taxation for all, ministerial responsibility, freedom of the press, and a greater measure of national independence.⁴³ Radical as this program sounded and it was in many respects, Wesselényi recoiled from advocating a revolution. Rather, he made a plea to the nobility, arguing that what he was proposing was “not a novelty but a restoration of the ancient noble democratic constitution” through the extension of certain rights to the dispossessed. In other words, “his objective was to win over the counties to his program and through them establish a civil and constitutional system.”⁴⁴

Differences between Széchenyi and Wesselényi tested their friendship. In his diary on March 13, 1835, Széchenyi wrote that “we shared the same goals but soon our paths diverged. I deplore everything he is doing. He is still my friend, though I could hand him a poisoned cup. [Yet] I cannot disown him.”⁴⁵ A somewhat subtle but revealing difference between them sheds light on their respective approaches to the problem of how to reconcile the “old” and the “new,” one of the most critical problems of their era. Széchenyi logically and rationally thought through this in *Hitel*. “The old is not good because it is old” he wrote, “and it can be either good or bad. The new is not bad because it is new and it can be either good or bad.” Wesselényi approached the

42 Miklós Wesselényi, *Balítéletekről* [On erroneous judgments] (Bukarest (in fact Leipzig), 1833), XXIX, 53, 109; Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa*, 71–2; Wesselényi, *Balítéletekről*, 60, 75.

43 Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa*, 76, 79.

44 Fónagy, *Wesselényi Miklós*, 13; Gergely, 54.

45 March 13, 1835, Széchenyi, 785.

same problem less abstractly, emphasizing both psychological and political angles. He questioned whether one “should give up the old if one desires the new” (and) whether one “should remove the new if one wishes to retain the old? These two conflicting impulses have the upper hand in all of us.”⁴⁶ The approach of Wesselényi most likely reflected the actual state of affairs among most nobles, and it therefore enhanced Wesselényi’s eventual political attractiveness to them.

Zsolt Trócsányi saw the essential conflict between Széchenyi and Wesselényi as between an economist and a politician. While this point has a great deal of truth, their conflict reached deeper. According to Trócsányi, Széchenyi, unlike Wesselényi, was not truly a “liberal politician” by inclination. Although this was not clear to either of them at the time and not necessarily clear to latter-day commentators either, the roles they had played did not just conflict; they complemented each other as well. Széchenyi was, first and foremost, a visionary utopian moralist, who also had a powerful practical bent for promoting his various projects. He hoped to shape his country’s future according to his own high moral standards, although he endorsed “the possible, rather than the imagined good” in *Hitel*, as if to brush aside the label of a moralist. Still, behind all his practical suggestions, the underlying impetus was his nation’s moral and spiritual regeneration, not by imposition but by the force of his moral persuasion. To the Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski, the pursuit of a utopia can be salutary as an “imaginative incentive,” because sometimes “we have to aim for out-sized objectives and employ the rhetoric of inflated hopes in order to achieve modest results... and we have to keep alive perfection as... an ideal standard against which we can measure our failures and achievements.” In this sense, Széchenyi’s role was critical, because he did shake up the Hungarian status quo with his combination of soaring rhetoric and proposals for reforms.

However, Wesselényi had the better practical sense of knowing how to bring them to fruition.⁴⁷ Although filled with the best of intentions towards his country’s future, Széchenyi had a strong tendency to believe that he could control the ways that Hungary was evolving. For

46 Quoted in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 61; Wesselényi, *Balítéletekről*, 6.

47 Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa*, 79; Gergely, 41; quoted in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 174; Leszek Kolakowski’s interviews with George Urban in 1981 in Leszek Kolakowski, *My Correct Views on Everything* (South Bend, 2005), 127–8.

all his faith in England and its liberal constitutionalism, as well as his faith in Lord Byron, his other models were aristocrats, including Prince Czartoryski in Poland before 1831, Baron Stein in Prussia, and Count Kiselev in Russia, who exercised considerable control in their countries.⁴⁸ Széchenyi refused to acknowledge that it was impossible to control Hungary in similar ways.

The existence of a vibrant political life in the counties and diets made Hungary a special case, where such a political life created its own dynamic. Széchenyi's desire to control that process and apply the brakes any time he thought that progress was proceeding too quickly or turning the wrong way proved to be an illusion. A small but revealing indication of this attitude concerned the casinos that were Széchenyi's initiatives to further social interaction among the educated segment of the population, regardless of rank and status. In the highly politicized atmosphere of the 1830s, when politics were infusing all institutions, the casinos were bound to become political. Yet, apparently, Széchenyi complained to Metternich about casinos becoming political against his, Széchenyi's, will.⁴⁹ Parties at the 1832–36 diet tried in vain to woo him, but, reflecting his distaste for politics, he proudly proclaimed himself as someone “who remains the master of his own destiny.” Other elements in Széchenyi's thinking were also unrealistic. He had no illusions about members of his own class. In fact, he was extremely critical of them in *Világ*, describing them as essentially indifferent towards their own country. Yet, he was also convinced that his fellow aristocrats had the means and the knowledge to lead the nation towards a better future. In reality, only a handful of aristocrats stood by his side.⁵⁰

Széchenyi emphatically stated that “I do find my salvation in a tight alliance with Austria.” This remained one of his enduring cardinal tenets, even though he was not blind to what he perceived as some of Vienna's erroneous policies, nor was he ever willing to diminish his own passionate commitment to Hungary. He knew Metternich well and visited him quite often, but the relationship between them was strained. Metternich was usually quite cold and formal at their meetings, often lecturing Széchenyi in long monologues. When Széchenyi gave Metternich a copy of *Hitel*, Metternich said, “You want some-

49 March 21, 1835, *Széchenyi*, 787.

50 April 26, 1835, *Széchenyi*, 788; Szekfü, *A mai Széchenyi*, 179.

thing good and noble... the government is not afraid of the light but it is afraid of fire," clearly implying that Széchenyi was playing with fire. Széchenyi quite correctly characterized Metternich as "afraid of the light and of upsetting anything."⁵¹

The principal problem lay in Széchenyi's failure to see Austro-Hungarian relations as part of an evolving and dynamic process. As long as Vienna faced the old-fashioned politics of grievance at successive diets, the government knew how to handle recalcitrant noble delegates with a combination of finesse, bribes, and occasional coercion. The gradual emergence of a liberal opposition shifted the argumentation in the direction of a greater measure of constitutional freedoms and national independence, both of which were anathema to Metternich. For Széchenyi, a gradual transformation of his country was a non-negotiable goal, but for Metternich, this would signal the first step towards insubordination and eventual secession. Metternich wished, in a sense, to immobilize history, but the attractive appeal of stability that had followed the revolutionary and Napoleonic turmoils was progressively eroding by the 1830s. Metternich's governing principle of "political quietism" was proving to be increasingly unworkable. The blame for these developments was at times put on the Hungarians. Another high-ranking official in Vienna, Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Kübeck, openly expressed his rage against them. "It would be easy," he jotted down in his diary in February, 1832, "for the government to crush the opposition of the nobility, which approaches intolerable insolence."⁵²

The 1832–36 diet was the first one in which a liberal opposition made its mark, not yet decisively but sufficiently strongly to be noticed. Liberal strength was often illusive, a reality acknowledged even by Károly Keckskeméti who has demonstrated a staunch predilection for the liberals. "In certain counties," Keckskeméti wrote, "liberals got elected, because conservative candidates were taken to be men of a foreign government. To vote for a liberal was a patriotic act, and it did not automatically signify that the voter was for progress." At the diets, "reform proposals often gotten stranded, running aground," he added,

51 June 22, 1830, *Széchenyi*, 640; March 1, 1830, *ibid.*, 630; April 5, 1833, *ibid.*, 737; Evans, "Széchenyi and Austria," 67.

52 Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 117; Evans, "Széchenyi and Austria," 67; *Tagebücher des Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Kübeck* (Vienna, 1909), 1: 548.

and “liberals, on their own, were in control only in fourteen counties, representing thirty-eight percent of the electorate.” The illusion of liberal dominance was part of a “majoritarian myth.”⁵³ Neither Kosáry nor Lackó subscribed to this myth. “The real trouble was the majority’s aversion to genuine reforms,” Kosáry wrote, “The proponents of change... in the Lower Chamber were a few medium landowners, such as Kölcsey and Deák. They fought not only against the retrograde majority and their “Werböczy-like views,” but also against the government of “Viennese oldsters.” Lackó observed that after “the unifying issue of Poland was struck from the agenda, the liberals found themselves in the minority.”⁵⁴ In fact, the reality was somewhat more nuanced than this statement claims. A few of the liberals were so outstanding that, in certain counties, one could talk about a “special process of elite-selection,” and this elite then exercised a definite attraction to nobles from other counties. This, in turn, contributed to the birth of the “majoritarian myth” about liberals.

Wesselényi was still the liberals’ acknowledged leader, but his effectiveness was somewhat diminished by his uncertain status—he was from Transylvania—and by his becoming a potential target of persecution by the authorities. Other mostly young delegates, including Ferenc Kölcsey, Ferenc Deák, Ödön Beöthy, István Bezerédj, among others, all of them highly educated members of the *bene possessionati*, provided support for Wesselényi and for the various liberal causes. However, all delegates were bound by the instructions they had received from their counties, which usually adhered to the old patterns of the politics of grievance. It was therefore critical for the liberals to create publicity, a public forum that could influence the most important people in the counties and also put pressure on the overwhelmingly conservative members of the Upper Chamber. Lajos Kossuth was prepared to distribute copies of his Parliamentary Reports to all corners of the country, creating, for the first time in the country’s history, “a truly national media.”⁵⁵

53 Kecskeméti, *La Hongrie et le reformisme liberal*, 79.

54 Domokos Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban* [Lajos Kossuth in the Age of Reform] (Budapest, 2002; originally published in 1943), 132. Lackó, *Széchenyi és Kossuth vitája*, 122.

55 Gergely, 91–3; Gábor Pajkossy, *Polgári átalakulás és nyilvánosság a magyar reformkorban* [Bourgeois transformation and publicity in the Hungarian Age of Reform] (Budapest, 1991), 3–5.

Yet the odds did not necessarily favor the liberals, who were understandably apprehensive. Ferenc Deák, in a letter written in 1832, lamented the fact that, although liberal arguments made an impact on many, this impact proved to be illusory, because “the nobility’s selfishness” prevailed at the end. Kölcsey was amazed to discover that quite a few among his fellow delegates refused to take notice of changes in society and thought as their ancestors had in the sixteenth century. “It is dreadful,” he wrote to Zsigmond Kende, “to legislate with two hundred people. And what a two hundred! They differ from one another in their principles and culture as if they lived in different centuries.” Some, Kölcsey observed, were clearly confused. They recognized the need for changes in society, but they would not abandon their pursuit of the politics of grievance against Vienna. Not admitting their confusion, they were hiding behind the cloak of sloganeering and craving for the limelight.⁵⁶

Nothing brought into sharper relief the difference between the conservative majority and the liberals than their different priorities. The conservatives wished to discuss the questions of tariffs and commerce, aiming at Hungary’s economic self-determination. This had been one of the most resilient grievances against Vienna—“all of us have been swimming in the delusion of mercantilism,” Pulszky remembered—and this question united all the counties, whether they were reactionary or progressive.⁵⁷ It was indicative of the times that the meaning of the word “progressive” was changing. The liberals, repudiating the pursuit of the ineffective policies of grievance, put forth the critical issue of relationship between landowners and serfs, which was as much a social and moral as an economic problem, crying out for solution. Kölcsey had no doubts about what needed to be done. “Seven hundred thousand noblemen,” he wrote to Zsigmond Kende, “versus ten million non-nobles... what is better, a conflict between the two, or making the latter, with concessions that do not harm the rights of the former, friends of the constitution?” The government also urged the discussion of this issue for tactical reasons. Kölcsey clearly recognized the difference in motives; while the govern-

56 Molnár, *A fiatal Deák Ferenc*, 254; July 16, 1833, Taxner-Tóth, *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése Kende Zsigmonddal*, 110; Ernő Taxner-Tóth, *Kölcsey és a magyar világ* [Kölcsey and the Hungarian world] (Budapest, 1992), 249.

57 Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 60; Barta, *A fiatal Kossuth*, 156.

ment wished to promote this issue for its own benefit, the aim of the liberals was the creation of a nation. "Liberty shared does not diminish it," Deák said, "but makes it much stronger."⁵⁸

Although fears of uprising by the serfs after the 1831 riots and the need to counter the government's tactical moves elevated the matter of landowner-serf relations to first priority, the liberal proposal of manumission compensation, which would have freed the serfs from their dependence on their lords, was voted down. Only a watered-down version of the original proposal, enabling the serfs to commute their robot, along with other relatively minor financial concessions, passed. "Only when the land is cultivated by freemen can a country be truly happy and prosperous," Deák warned in vain. Yet, although he was disillusioned by the meager result, Deák was philosophical about it. "We wish that we could have done more for the people," he wrote to Wesselényi, "but what we achieved is a gain in our current position against the selfish majority that worships what is old because it is old." Kossuth's reaction was similar. "Many good people mourn what had died," he wrote, adding that "if one has patience, then it is easier to tolerate what cannot be changed." Even before Kossuth reacted to this defeat, the government had decided to destroy the liberal opposition as much as possible and successfully used pressure on several counties to change the instructions to their delegates. When Kölcsey failed to persuade the Szatmár County Assembly against doing this, he resigned his position. His farewell speech was enthusiastically received even by his opponents. In it, Kölcsey gave evidence of his humanity and high ethical principles. "We do not wish that those with whom we disagree should cater to us," he declared, "only that they should believe in the purity of our convictions... our slogans are country and progress... the consequence of falling behind would be a great deal of suffering."⁵⁹

58 December 21, 1833, Kölcsey to Kende in Taxner-Tóth, *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése Kende Zsigmonddal*, 57; Zoltán Szabó G., *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 90; quoted in Ágnes Deák and András Molnár, *Deák Ferenc* (Budapest, 2003), 44.

59 Quoted in Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 45; June 27, 1834, Deák to Wesselényi, in *Deák Ferenc emlékezete. Levelek 1822–1875* (Budapest, 1890), 5; Kosáry, 276; quoted in Gábor Pajkossy, "Elejtették az V. cikelyt... Adalék az önkéntes örökváltság 1834. évi megbuktatásának történetéhez" [Clause V was dropped... Data to the rejection of the 1834 voluntary manumission compensation] in Márton Szilágyi and Orsolya Völgyesi (eds.), *Szövegkönyv. Tanulmányok Kerényi Ferenc hatvanadik születésnapjára* [Festschrift on the

Another issue, leading to a renewal of an old controversy, reignited the seemingly dormant but still existing religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, involved mixed marriages and produced acrimonious debates.⁶⁰ Both Catholics and Protestants could be found among the liberals, but for them these issues had much less to do with religion than with the principle of freedom of conscience. The acrimony accompanying this discussion became so divisive, dividing the opposition itself, that the liberals decided to table it, especially as they expected to be in the minority on this issue.

Acrimony was further enhanced by the presence of the so-called "parliamentary youth," who were young associates attached to the delegates. Once known for their rowdiness, most of them had become committed to their liberal political beliefs by the 1832–1836 diet. One of them, Ferenc Pulszky, remembered the impact that liberal views from abroad and Széchenyi's *Stádium* had made on him and on his like-minded friends. They, in fact, thought that Széchenyi's reform proposals did not go far enough. Attending most sessions, they vociferously opposed conservative speakers, while loudly cheering their liberal heroes.⁶¹

At the same time, a few questions at this diet were solved almost unanimously. Support for the Poles, whose rebellion against Russia was crushed in 1831, came naturally to Hungarians, as the mutual affinity between the two countries was historically grounded. The government, allied to Russia, tried hard to dampen and neutralize Hungarian enthusiasm, which was symbolic in any event. As Kölcsey noted, "we lost the Polish cause. But, then, that was [already] lost in London and Paris."⁶² Another issue was the reunification of Hungary and Transylvania, especially promoted by the Transylvanian Wesselényi, but this issue also remained unresolved, primarily because Vienna preferred the *status quo*.

occasion of Ferenc Kerényi's 60th birthday] (Budapest, 2005), 291; Gábor Pajkossy, "Kölcsey követi lemondásának történetéhez" [On the resignation of Kölcsey as a delegate], *Századok* 130, no. 5 (1996), 1191; quoted in Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 99.

60 Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 93; Gergely, 101; Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa*, 99.

61 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 303–5; Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 102–3.

62 Quoted in a letter of Kölcsey to László Bártfay, December 5, 1833, Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 95.

The issue of when to use the Hungarian language in the legislative process appeared to be a merely technical one. The Lower Chamber suggested its universal use, while the Upper Chamber wished to restrict it merely to the exchanges between the two Chambers. In fact, the ensuing debate, involving the delegates and officials of the government, opened up fundamental controversies concerning the evolution of Hungarian nationalism, as well as the intricate relationships between Hungarians and the government and between Hungarians and non-Magyar ethnic groups. These controversies bridged certain ideological gulfs, in some ways, because cultural nationalists who were otherwise traditionalists were on the same side with the liberals in their joint support for the Magyar language. Opposing them were old-fashioned conservatives to whom the classical tradition or the use of German was more important than cultivation of the national language. According to Mihály Horváth, Lord Chief Justice Count Antal Cziráky burst into tears, complaining that this cultivation was tantamount to the demise of the Hungarian constitution.⁶³

Critical comments by government officials ran mostly in their customary tracks. Metternich repeated the frequent argument that, because Hungary was a multi-ethnic country where Hungarians constituted only a minority, the use of Latin as the most learned and broadly-applied language was justified. He dismissed “so-called patriotic sentiments,” calling them “unhealthy and calculating.” Counselor Norbert Purkhart agreed, claiming that for eight hundred years Latin had been the sole language of laws.⁶⁴ These arguments were somewhat disingenuous, given that the Habsburgs used French to govern Belgium and Italian in their northern Italian provinces and in Dalmatia. The real reason that the government in Vienna wanted to retain Latin was its goal of keeping tighter control over Hungary, a stubbornly unruly part of the Monarchy.⁶⁵

Still, Metternich’s argument had made a certain sense in the past when the Hungarian language was undeveloped. However, by the 1830s, even a relatively more moderate member of the government, Counselor and later Chief Justice György Majláth, asserted that “the Hungarians form an eminent majority [as the largest ethnic group], and

63 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 1: 315.

64 *Iratok*, 409–11, 452.

65 Letter of András Gergely to the author, August 20, 2010.

apart from German, their language is the most cultured.” He, along with Palatine Joseph, was prepared to compromise and use Latin and Hungarian side by side in official texts.⁶⁶ The liberals as passionate nationalists were not interested in any kind of compromise. Nationalism generated its own dynamic, and R.J.W. Evans’ characterization fits the 1830s in Hungary. “Nationalism became largely a matter of defining a single identity, eliminating the claims of other cultures and languages with which the individual was familiar,” Evans wrote. The liberals were emphatic in universally deriding Latin as a dead language.⁶⁷

To most Hungarians, whether liberal or conservative, the cause of their native language was crucial for the very existence of the nation. In a message to the Upper Chamber in 1833, delegates from the Lower Chamber wrote that “a nation can survive if exiled to another land, but not if it loses its own language.” These delegates also perceived their native language as part of their sense of permanence. In an earlier and also in the same 1833 message, they described the Hungarian language as an ancient heritage, which should be restored to its dominance as an integral part of natural law. Finally, in an 1835 message, the delegates of the Lower Chamber made it clear that the cause of the national language was organically tied to the twin ideas of “national independence and liberty.”⁶⁸ Naturally, liberals and conservatives interpreted “liberty” differently, but it was becoming an axiom that Hungarians were the only ones in the Danube Basin—with the minor exception of the Croats—who had the superior historical experience and culture to be the dominant nation. This claim, in turn, justified the efforts of “magyarization,” that is, the imposition of Hungarian language and culture on non-Hungarians. What from the vantage point of the present may appear arrogant and narrow-minded was, for the liberal nationalists at the time, the best means of securing and promoting a higher level of culture in all parts of their country. Implied was the belief that non-Hungarians would also benefit from

66 *Iratok*, 449.

67 R.J.W. Evans, “Nationality in East-Central Europe: Perception and definition before 1848” in R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 109–10; Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 91.

68 *Iratok*, 404, 403, 428.

receiving the blessings of liberty, which were part and parcel of a higher level of culture.

All these points appeared in the speech of István Bezerédj, a liberal delegate from Tolna County, who demanded on March 27, 1835 that the language of instruction in all schools should be Hungarian, precisely because this would accomplish a much-desired objective. At the same time, as a liberal, he recoiled from supporting a proposal to deprive those who did not speak Hungarian of their civil rights. Széchenyi, in his 1835 book *Hunnia*, endorsed both ideas. He approved replacing Latin with Hungarian without “bothering anyone in the practice of his own religion, language, customs, and national particularities.”⁶⁹ What both Bezerédj and Széchenyi advocated was *magyarosodás* (“becoming Hungarian”), rather than *magyarosítás*, meaning the same but implying coercion.⁷⁰ Hungarian nationalism was not racist, although this was probably small comfort to non-Hungarian nationalists. Whoever learned Hungarian and declared himself as such was welcomed with open arms. In this sense, though Hungarian nationalism was romantic in its core mentality, the kind of generalization that would take Germany as a model, where “the romantic concept of the nation closed the borders to outsiders,”⁷¹ did not apply to Hungary. Still, a host of critical questions may be asked: What were the specific requirements of acceptance? Was it sufficient for someone to become a Hungarian only in public, or was it also necessary to be a Hungarian in his private life? Were there any guarantees that nationalist extremists would not in time ignore the ethical impediments that Bezerédj and Széchenyi designed to build into the fabric of Hungarian national policies?

To both liberal and conservative nationalists, support and promotion of the nationalist program were the fulfillment and consummation of a natural historical evolution. What they failed to recognize were the unforeseen consequences. They saw their involvement in a national renewal as the end result, rather than merely a phase in a dynamic process. A few Austrian critics of Hungarian policies did become aware

69 István Bodnár and Albert Gárdonyi, *Bezerédj István* (Budapest, 1918), 1: 193–4; István Széchenyi, *Hunnia* (Pest, 1858), 52.

70 Evans, “Der ungarische Nationalismus im internationalen Vergleich,” 298.

71 Bernhard Giesen, *Intellectuals and the German Nation: Collective Identity in an Axial Age* (Cambridge, 1998; originally published in German in 1993), 96.

of how this process might further unfold, and what they predicted was a likely future trend. Leopold Kintzl, lieutenant in the army, submitted a memorandum in 1833 to the Council of State, predicting Hungary's alienation and eventual secession from the rest of the Monarchy if Hungarian policies were to prevail. Joseph Kussevich, a member of that Council, expressed his fear in 1836 about linguistic separatism, which he thought would destroy the Monarchy. Chief Justice Count Antal Cziráky, in his memorandum of August 31, 1836, warned the government about Hungarian separatism, arguing that, in his opinion, it would lead to the ruin of the "monarchical-aristocratic frame of mind."⁷²

Last but not least, it was naïve to think that educated segments of the non-Magyar intelligentsia, who in fact took Hungarian nationalism as their model, would willingly accept the condescension and rather humiliating role that Hungarian liberals assigned to them. They saw this approach as not liberal at all but a "thoroughly conservative, noble-dominated option."⁷³ In fact, the Hungarian model attracted some non-Hungarians and repelled others. The key difference had to do with a given group's sense of identity, that is, whether it had a strong one or one that was either weak or had no ethnic content.

Although this was the general pattern, marks of identities were not carved in stone, because they frequently depended on individual circumstances. The Germans in Hungary qualified as having had a relatively weak attachment to the German people as a racially and ethnically circumscribed group. They harmonized, on the whole, their insistence on maintaining their German language and culture with their patriotic feelings toward Hungary, which the majority of them considered their *Heimat*, their country. Márton Schwartner and Lajos (Ludwig) Schedius personified this attitude. Károly György (Karl Georg) Rummy dedicated his life to mediating between Hungarians and Germans. "One can," Rummy wrote in an April 23, 1831 article of *Der Spiegel*, "be a genuine Hungarian patriot who understands the Hungarian language and appreciates the beauty and attraction of Hungarian literature and [still] write in German, which we acquired in

72 *Iratok*, 413, 445, 484–5. At the end, both the Upper Chamber and the government conceded the issue albeit reluctantly, agreeing that all juridical documents were to be published in Hungarian.

73 From a letter of April 23, 2010 by R.J.W. Evans to the author.

our youth, and which [would have the advantage] of being understood when read abroad.”

Indeed, the attraction was reciprocal. Not only did educated Hungarians read, write, and speak German, but a few of them, like Móricz Lukács, published articles and poems in *Der Spiegel*. Some understandable frictions, such as the natural rivalry between the German and Hungarian theaters in Pest, did exist. In Tolna County, sending the local Swabians' children to learn Hungarian in schools was a success, but the very same Swabians drew the line when the county authorities wanted to force them to abandon wearing their German stockings. In general, many Hungarians recoiled from anything German, which they associated with Vienna and its real and putative anti-Hungarian attitudes and policies, but this never stopped close interactions between the two communities. Consequently, the process of assimilation was relatively strongest among Germans in towns, especially in those where they rubbed shoulders with Hungarians and where the attractions of a Hungarian liberal culture proved to be the most powerful, such as in Pest. This culture proved attractive to Germans even in regions where they lived in a mass, as the Swabians in Transdanubia and the Zipsers in Northern Hungary did.⁷⁴

The force of assimilation also grew strong in the Jewish community, where it was slowed down not by some kind of ethnic affiliation but, rather, by adherence to orthodox religious laws and practices. Orthodox rabbis held tight control over their congregations and fought tooth and nail any attempt to loosen that hold, an attempt that did finally emerge in Hungary, following the lead of the German-Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah. Rabbi Áron Chorin, the head of the congregation at Arad, was a pioneer of the Jewish Enlightenment in Hungary, trying to reconcile the Talmud with reason and also to promote sermons in German and the use of the organ. Although he was severely attacked, he did not stand alone, as other rabbis chose to follow his lead. Apart from this struggle, a few young Jews entered universities in Vienna, Prague, and even in Pest, thereby becoming the

74 Pukánszky, *Német polgárság magyar földön*, 22–3; István Fried, “Magyar–német kettős irodalmiság” [Hungarian–German double literary world], *Filológiai Szemle* 34, no. 4 (1988), 210–1; Braun, “Tolna vármegye nemzetiségi politikája a reformkorban,” 19. Letter of András Gergely to the author, August 20, 2010.

vanguard of assimilants. The bulk of the Jews in Pest in 1820 were merchants, but some of the better educated gravitated to journalism. From the end of the 1830s, most contributors to German newspapers and journals were Jewish, including the influential editor-in-chief of *Der Ungar*, Hermann Klein. By 1848, one of them, Ignác Einhorn, declared himself to be enthusiastically Hungarian. Yet, their situation in the country was still precarious throughout the 1830s. They had to pay the so-called “toleration tax,” could not buy property, could not enter any of the guilds, and, in addition to journalism, could become part of only the medical profession. Jews who lived in villages rented inns and then turned to trade in produce, frequently in the service of the large landowners.⁷⁵

The anomalous situation of the Jews awakened the interest of Hungarian liberals, who passed a resolution at the 1832–36 diet to abolish the “toleration tax,” making it a grievance. However, nothing happened and the law did remain on the books. Nor was acceptance of Jews universal. Many, mostly German members of urban guilds hated Jews as their actual or potential competitors. Széchenyi, while acknowledging their economic usefulness, was wary of them as “a contaminating element whose absorption into Hungary the nation cannot afford because of the much larger proportion of Jews in the country... compared to countries in the west.” At the same time, one can find evidence of a warm welcome. The writer Péter Vajda published an article in *Hasznos Mulatságok* in 1833, in which he equated the Hungarians, “an oriental people,” with the Jews of Pest, writing about the so-called Orczy-House, where, on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings, “one can hear the pleasures of Asiatic sounds... kinsman-like sounds, oriental flowers in Pest.”⁷⁶

Although Croatia’s autonomy was recognized by Hungary, where Croats were represented at the diets, Croats felt threatened by the movement for making the Hungarian language dominant. For this rea-

75 Gonda, *A zsidóság Magyarországon*, 60–2; Aladár Komlós, *Magyar–zsidó szellemi történet a reformkortól a holocaustig* [Hungarian–Jewish intellectual history from the Age of Reform through the Holocaust] (Budapest, 1997), 1: 16–8, 22–3.

76 Gonda, *A zsidóság Magyarországon*, 66–7; Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary* (Detroit, 1996), 231–2; Anna Szalai, *Házalók, árendások, kocsmárosok, uzsorások. Zsidóábrázolás a reformkori prózában* [Peddlers, lease-holders, innkeepers, usurers: Portraits of Jews in Age of Reform prose] (Budapest, 2002), 99–100.

son, they became fervent defenders of the use of Latin. Ljudevit Gaj's idea of "Illyranism" further deepened Croatian–Hungarian animosities. This idea claimed that all Southern Slavs, because they were presumed to have descended from the ancient Illyrians, should be united into one nation. This idea spawned several fruitful cultural institutions, including Croatian newspapers, theaters and reading circles. However, the Croats' intransigent opposition to all things Hungarian also turned them against liberalism and tied Croats to both extreme clerical influences and to the policies of Vienna, although such stands were not uniform among the Croats, either.⁷⁷

The dreams of Serbs about restoring territorial autonomy within Hungary never died. In fact, this was the gist of their church-inspired resolution passed by a Serbian congress at Karlóca (Sremski Karlovci/Karlowitz) in 1837 and rejected both by Vienna and the Hungarians. Serbs in Hungary were recognized only as a Greek Orthodox religious community. What nevertheless diluted the strength of this resolution was the growth of Serbian communities, outside their dense concentration in southern Hungary, in such places as Komárom, Szentendre, Buda, and Pest. Buda and especially Pest became centers of a Serbian cultural renewal. The university press published many books in Serbian; a cultural Serbian institution, the "Srpska Matica," was founded in 1826; a wealthy Serb, Száva Thököly (Tekeli), established a foundation for the aid of Serbian students in 1810 and reinforced it in 1838. The students lived in the so-called "Thökölyanum," a Serbian dormitory. Close friendships with Hungarian literati characterized Mihály Vitkovics, who was equally at home in Hungarian and Serbian cultural milieus. Others, however, expressed interest in "Illyrianism," especially university students who became attracted to a democratic form of "Panslavism" or to a secular variant of Serbian nationalism, aiming at the restoration of Tsar Dusan's medieval empire. Hungarians, on the whole, treated the Serbs with respect—they had a military past and later contributed much to the Hungarian economy—and Serbian poetry became quite popular in Hungarian literary circles.⁷⁸

77 Arató, *A nemzetiségi kérdés története Magyarországon*, 1: 207–17; Sokcsevsits, *Magyar múlt horvát szemmel*, 23–31.

78 Ferdinándy and Gogolák, *Magyarok és délszlávok*, 28–36; Pelyach, "Szerbek Magyarországon 1848 előtt," 42–3; Zombori, *A szerbek Magyarországon*, 35–7.

The Slovaks turned into the principal targets of suspicion and condescension on the part of the Hungarians, and, in return, Slovak attacks on the Hungarians stung the most. This was ironic, because the majority of Slovaks were poor peasants who were preoccupied with survival and constituted no genuine threat to Hungarians. They were divided between Catholics and Lutherans, each with their distinct dialect and imbued with mutual dislike of each other, but in many northern counties of Hungary, Slovaks and Hungarians, frequently a small minority, coexisted in close proximity. This, in turn, engendered a sense among Hungarians of feeling overwhelmed by Slovaks in their own country. Magnified bursts of superiority by the Hungarians was a form of an antidote for their fears. They tended to be contemptuous of the Slovaks, although that contempt was not yet as acute as it later became. Still, the saying, *a krumpli nem étel, a tót* [a disdainful Hungarian name for Slovaks] *nem ember* ("the potato is no food and the Slovak is no human being") was definitely insulting to Slovaks. Pulszky remembered that his father regarded the Slovak language "as so inferior that only peasants and servants would speak it."⁷⁹

The situation was less dire in towns where educated Slovaks and Hungarians could live in harmony. Juraj Palkovič from Pozsony, a good friend of János Kis, was a Slovak who felt that Hungary was his country. His journal, *Týdenník*, was meant to function as a bridge between the two communities. In Pest-Buda, Slovaks, mostly day laborers but also some working as officials in the royal administration or at the university, lived in large numbers. Anton Ottmayer was the dean of the law school in 1832–33, and the university press published a number of books in Slovak. Yet, the best-known Slovak in Pest was the Lutheran pastor Ján Kollár, a disciple of Herder, who celebrated the unity of Slavs in his 1824 epic poem, "The daughter of Slava." Kollár and his admirers, mostly in Slovak theological seminaries, expressed strong anti-Hungarian sentiments. The urge to fight back was strong among some of the Slovaks, while others, many of them noblemen, chose to escape the odium of condescension and

79 Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 97.

contempt and opted to assimilate, to become members of the Hungarian ruling nation.⁸⁰

A book, entitled *Sollen wir Magyaren werden?* ("Should we become Magyars?"), published in 1833, was perhaps the most hard-hitting attack on "magyarization." Ljudevit Gaj assisted in its publication, and its author had a misleading Croat-sounding pseudonym, Domoljúb Horvatovich. In fact, he was Samuel Hojc, a Slovak Lutheran pastor. "The impact of these efforts is nothing other than the ruin of the country" was how he described "magyarization" in Nógrád County. The book stirred up strong and mostly negative feelings in Hungary, primarily among members of the diet, some of whom wanted to make it into a grievance. How could a censor allow it to be published?, they wanted to know. At the end, cooler heads prevailed when it was recognized that railing against the softness of censorship would cut across the national objective of hoping to eliminate censorship altogether. Széchenyi was characteristically even-handed about this issue. "I read (the book)," he wrote, "it is bitter but most of it is true." Deák, on the other hand, called it "foolish and disgraceful."⁸¹

GOVERNMENT AGGRESSION AGAINST THE LIBERALS

Vienna's actions or lack of actions always depended, to some extent, on the Monarchy's international status. When feeling strong, the government was less in need of the support by Hungarian nobles; on the

80 István Fried, "Juraj Palkovics soproni kapcsolatai" [Juraj Palkovics' companionships in Sopron], *Soproni Szemle* 21, no. 1 (1967), 55–60; Kálmán Kindlovits, "Egy elfeledett nemzetiségi hetilap a 19. század második évtizedéből" [A forgotten nationality weekly from the second decade of the 19th century], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 112, no. 4 (1996), 461–77; István Fried, "Szlovákok Pest-Budán a 19. században" [The Slovaks in Pest-Buda in the 19th century], *Regio* 1, no. 3 (1990), 52–5; Zdeněk V. David, "Johann Gottfried Herder and the Czech national awakening: A reassessment," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies* 1807, 13–5; István Käfer, *A miénk és az övék. Írások a magyar–szlovák szellemi kölcsönösségről* [Ours and theirs: Writings on the Hungarian–Slovak intellectual reciprocity] (Budapest, 1991), 60–2.

81 *Sollen wir Magyaren werden?* (Karlstadt, 1833), 9; Arató, *A nemzetiségi kérdés története*, 1: 233; May 25, 1833, *Széchenyi*, 738; July 4, 1833, Deák to József Oszterhueber, in Pál Sándor (ed.), *Deák Ferenc országgyűlési levelei, 1833–1834* [The letters of Ferenc Deák from the diet in 1833–1834] (Zalaegerszeg, 1997), 40.

contrary, it felt empowered to enhance its domestic control. The 1833 treaty of Münchengrätz with Russia had given the Monarchy a sense of strength, because it was now allied with the most powerful country in the east, equally committed to upholding a conservative legitimacy. In 1835, Emperor/King Francis died and his son, Ferdinand, a good-natured but feeble-minded archduke, followed him. The real power in Vienna became divided between Metternich and Count Franz Kolowrat-Liebsteinsky, a Bohemian aristocrat. Notwithstanding the rivalry between them, they did agree on imposing a harsher rule on Hungary. According to Deák, Metternich was convinced that a conspiracy in Hungary was being hatched as a forerunner of a revolution.⁸²

As a prelude to this turn of events, the government accelerated its efforts to lure into its orbit oppositional figures, including such stalwarts as Pál Nagy Felsőbüki and Tamás Ragályi. In addition, pressure was being put on county assemblies, with the assistance of local conservatives, to force the delegates to adhere to their strict conservative guidelines. As a result, several delegates were recalled, and three, Kölcsey among them, resigned.⁸³

The prime target of persecution remained Wesselényi, whom the government succeeded in indicting on the flimsy charge of “disloyalty” in 1835. The liberal opposition was able to mobilize the Lower Chamber, because an old grievance, assault on the freedom of speech, was now emerging anew. Deák and Ödön Beöthy took the lead; the latter’s principal argument was that Wesselényi did not attack the king but the government, which was well within the confines of permissible activities. Chief Justice Count Antal Cziráky in the Upper Chamber invoked, yet again, the example of the French Revolution, in order to justify curtailing freedom of speech, lest the ensuing conflagration destroy the country.⁸⁴ His reasoning was effective, because the two Chambers were incapable of reaching a mutual agreement.

82 Gábor Pajkossy, “A kormányzati ‘terrorizmus’ politikája Magyarországon 1835 és 1839 között” [The politics of governmental “terrorism” in Hungary between 1835 and 1839], *Századok* 141, no. 3 (2007), 685.

83 Gergely, 107–8.

84 Zsolt Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós hűtlenségi pere* [The disloyalty lawsuit of Miklós Wesselényi] (Budapest, 1986), 48, 52, 58; Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarországi történelméből*, 2: 9.

The trial of Wesselényi dragged out for years, and he was finally sentenced to three years in prison in 1839, despite his having heroically rescued many victims at the flood in Pest in 1838. He actually spent only a month and a half in jail, because, upon Deák's intervention, he was allowed to enter a sanatorium in Bohemia to be treated for his eye disease, which eventually resulted in blindness. Although he largely faded from active political life, Wesselényi maintained his interest in the fate of his country. He published a book on the assumed Slav danger to Hungary in 1843. When he reappeared as a delegate to the diet in April 1848, he was warmly received and celebrated by his fellow delegates.⁸⁵

Other manifestations of governmental oppression included enhancing the power of the government-appointed Lord Lieutenants in the counties, making the censorship more rigorous, replacing the relatively moderate chancellor Ádám Reviczky with the ultra-reactionary Count Fidél Pálffy, and suing and imprisoning leaders of the young associates to delegates, among them László Lovassy, who had become insane in jail. Deák was extremely critical about the persecution of the associates. "It is dreadful what they are doing to these young men," he wrote to Wesselényi, adding that "the charges are very general and broad... it is all hush-hush, as if they dread a just public opinion. Other governments let people know that necessity led them to use harsh measures, but ours chose secret-mongering." In another severe blow to the liberals, the government arrested and imprisoned Kossuth himself in 1837.⁸⁶

The liberals were devastated by this turn of events. Already in 1834, Kölcsey dejectedly wrote that "liberalism, the desire to progress, has undoubtedly been our principal prime mover... but we are not only not progressing, but going backwards." Deák's analysis was also pessimistic. "Everywhere in the counties, prejudices are rampant, and one finds indifference about public affairs and thick ignorance." In addition, Deák was deeply saddened by Kölcsey's resignation from the diet. In a letter to Kölcsey, Deák wrote about how much he missed his comrade-in-arms, further stating that "it is the curse of fate that our people are not becoming a nation because they do not want to.

85 Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós hűtlenségi pere*, 103, 107.

86 Pajkossy, "A kormányzati 'terrorizmus' politikája," 690–4, 713; Deák to Wesselényi, September 10, 1836, *Deák Ferenc emlékezete*, 24.

Our standing is worse by the hour, our numbers are so few that the failure of our efforts is becoming the subject of derision—cowardice and vanity are spreading in our ranks.” Kölcsey himself appeared resigned about his leaving the diet. As he wrote in a letter to Pál Szemere on January 24, 1835, “the day of enlightenment has not yet arrived in our country.” Nevertheless, he must have been devastated. In his poem, “Zrínyi második éneke” (“The second song of Zrínyi”), composed in 1835, he wrote about “poison pouring into our nation’s deep wound,” again referring to the likelihood of the nation’s death.⁸⁷

Liberal despair partially stemmed from feeling trapped in a largely inhospitable environment and abused by both fellow noblemen and the government. These liberals lacked the luxury of a longer perspective, and their occasional optimism was based not on concrete and tangible projections, but, rather, on their own romantic dreams. It was only historians who could see that the apparent disaster for liberals carried in it the seeds of their eventual triumphs. In Szekfű’s judgment, “the compromise between king and the estates collapsed with Wesselényi’s indictment.” Kosáry thought that “the policy of coercion with its unjust lawsuits only strengthened the oppositional trend in public opinion.”⁸⁸ Indeed, Austrian absolutist oppression was self-defeating. It was harsh enough to alienate an ever-growing number of Hungarians, but not harsh enough to silence them for good. Vienna, for all its punitive actions, left intact the autonomy of the counties, which were the actual or potential hotbeds of resistance. Dismantling this system would have required military intervention, and for this Vienna lacked the necessary resolve.

The formation of a liberal party was a gradual process that had its beginnings only in the second half of the 1830s. A loose alliance among like-minded men, entrenched in their various counties, most aptly describes this early stage of Hungarian liberalism. Dissemination of their ideas and a rudimentary form of coordination was especially critical when liberals were sustaining multiple attacks, Kossuth’s Municipal Reports performed these vital tasks. “It was an excellent

87 Kölcsey to Kende, July 11, 1834, *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése*, 142; Deák to Kölcsey, January 25, 1835; Deák to Kölcsey, March 22, 1835, *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése*, 197, 199; Zoltán Szabó, *Kölcsey Ferenc*, 101; Jancsó, *Kölcsey Ferenc válogatott munkái*, 71.

88 Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 307; Kosáry, 277.

idea,” wrote István Deák, adding that “as liberal friends everywhere sent reports to Kossuth, his foremost job was a careful sifting, editing and distributing of the information he had received from all parts of the country.”⁸⁹ These activities undoubtedly led to his eventual arrest.

Although Kossuth gave primacy to liberal voices, he did not dismiss the conservatives, and he treated some of them, such as Ede Zsedényi of Szepes County, with respect. As for Zsedényi, he called liberal proposals eccentric and warned that they would destroy “the aristocratic system” and ultimately “endanger Europe.” In other instances, Kossuth’s sarcasm was evident. Commenting on the Latin speech by Dénes Justh of Nyitra County, blaming the French for every possible ill, Kossuth noted in parentheses that Justh lumped together a variety of French politicians under one rubric, an oblique reference to Justh’s ignorance.⁹⁰

Quoting from speeches, Kossuth presented liberal objectives and also gave space to new ideas. János Balogh of Barcs County summarized the liberal creed which had become known by the mid-1830s. “I do not want to abrogate nobles’ privileges; rather, I wish to extend them to all patriots,” Balogh said on July 18, 1836, “and include in the benefits of the Hungarian constitution all those who had been hitherto excluded from it.” Kossuth gave publicity to protests over what liberals considered unlawful persecutions. Ödön Beöthy of Bihar County questioned whether, in an enlightened age, any conspiracy would have made sense, and he thought that this had absolutely not been the case for the persecuted young associates.

Sarcasm was prominent in Kossuth’s description of other instances. In Fejér County, Abbot Count Domonkos Zichy had strongly endorsed all the royal edicts and commands, where-upon a liberal opponent, László Madarász asked him, “on what legal grounds?” Kossuth gleefully noted the long silence and absence of an answer to the question. He also quoted from a speech by Gábor Klauzál of Csongrád County, who advocated education of the masses, and speeches by József Patay and András Fáy of Pest County, advocating

89 István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849* (New York, 1979), 31.

90 Lajos Kossuth, *Törvényhatósági tudósítások* [Municipal reports] (Budapest, 1879), 137, 177.

that delegates, during the six years from the end of a diet, be prohibited from accepting any governmental office or any other royal favors.⁹¹

THE 1839–40 DIET

The counties were in an uproar, and even signs of unrest among some of the serfs, whose expectations for a change were rising, started to appear.⁹² Although the polarization between liberals and conservatives continued, the unjust lawsuits, imprisonments, and concomitant violation of the freedom of conscience of those accused men mobilized both camps, even if not to the same degree. The heart and center of resistance was in Zala County; Ferenc Deák from Zala emerged as the liberals' leader. Kölcsey was influential, but not really a leader; Wesselényi was removed from the scene by the government; and Kossuth, though also influential, was not yet in a leadership position.⁹³ In spite of government interference, county assemblies maintained frequent contacts with one another. During the spring of 1839, Deák himself, hoping for the redress of unlawful activities, worked on the text of his own instructions, which then became the model for other delegates from other counties. Its essence was a demand for judicial remedies. Deák knew that such a demand would unite the nobility, and this was exactly what happened. In a memorandum, he repudiated the government's conspiracy theory, stating that Hungarians, loyal to the throne, were prepared to forget the unlawful acts, but only if the government would free those who were imprisoned and thereby restore trust.⁹⁴

Metternich realized that continuing his policies of repression was becoming untenable, especially because the Monarchy's international

91 Ibid., 104, 56, 202, 50, 93–4.

92 Gergely, 135.

93 Letter of Gábor Pajkossy to the author, October 27, 2010.

94 Gyula Erdmann, "Deák az 1839–1840. évi országgyűlésen" [Deák at the 1839–1840 diet] in András Molnár (ed.), *Zala követe, Pest képviselője. Deák Ferenc országgyűlési tevékenysége, 1833–1873* [A delegate of Zala, deputy of Pest: The parliamentary activities of Ferenc Deák 1833–1873] (Zalaegerszeg, 2004), 41. The authorship of this memorandum is debated; Pajkossy thinks that Wesselényi was its author. Pajkossy, "A kormányzati 'terrorizmus' politikája Magyarországon," 714.

standing was considerably weakening by the late 1830s. Russia and England, ignoring Austria, jointly shored up the Ottoman Empire against the successful revolt by Mohammed Ali, the governor of Egypt, then part of the Empire. The French supported Ali, which produced a threat of war. Austria, an ally of Russia, could not afford such a war. Although the crisis was peacefully resolved in 1840, the Monarchy's prestige had suffered a blow.⁹⁵ When Chancellor Fidél Pálffy resigned in December, 1838, he was replaced by a somewhat more accommodating Antal Majláth. Palatine Joseph was again willing to play the role of a conciliator. Although he preferred delegates who were loyal to the government to be elected to the next diet, the Archduke wished to avoid provoking the liberal opposition.⁹⁶ Another impetus to reconciliation was the fact that recruiting to the Army stretched out to ten-year terms, and the pledges made in 1830 were coming to an end in 1840, which, in turn, fostered the necessity to reconcile with the Hungarian nobility.⁹⁷

As Pulszky, then a young delegate from Sáros County, remembered, to be a liberal in 1839 still had certain disadvantages, such as abandoning hope for a government job, being exposed to secret calumnies by informers and scorn from official circles, and having problems in getting passports. Nor was liberalism advocating the mitigation of class and confessional disparities able to overcome a deeply entrenched spirit of caste, which kept aristocrats isolated from untitled nobles, nobles from the urban delegates, and all of them from Pozsony's inhabitants. In contrast to the old tradition that had honored the concept of unity of all nobles, regardless of political or other differences among them, conservatives and liberals began to segregate at meals and walks by 1839. To counter such a trend, lunches and parties were organized to prevent political adversity from turning into rudeness with a personal edge. Indeed, Pulszky and other mostly young delegates enjoyed themselves thoroughly in Pozsony. What helped this spirit was a certain consensus about a few leaders from both camps, universally liked by everybody. The conservative Ede Zsedényi was widely admired for his sunny disposition and outstanding ability to lead the cotillion, and everybody recognized the brilliance

95 Gergely, 141–2.

96 Erdmann, "Deák az 1839–1840. évi országgyűlésen," 41–2.

97 Letter of András Gergely to the author, August 20, 2010.

of the young conservative leader, Count Aurél Dessewffy, the son of József. The same respect and admiration, even by agents of the secret police, surrounded Ferenc Deák.⁹⁸

While Deák had none of Wesselényi's romantic exuberance, he did have calm, wisdom, an excellent sense of tactics, and the ability to create harmony among delegates who had frequently conflicting instructions from their respective counties. His speeches were noted for their clarity and strong logic, and Deák was also personable and a good listener.⁹⁹

Occasional pleasantries around lunch and dinner tables and in the ballrooms did not, of course, eliminate passionate political disagreements. Excerpts from the speeches of Zsedényi and Mór Szentkirályi on the same day, August 1, 1839, who were both responding to a royal ordinance, illustrated a characteristic contrast. Zsedényi found it "loyal in spirit" and "perfect" as for its merit, underlined by "cautious and paternal care." In his opinion, failing to respond gratefully to this overture would be wrong. Szentkirályi from Pest County, on the other hand, emphasized all the injuries that had been done to the constitution, resulting in despair and mistrust.¹⁰⁰

The Lower Chamber put forward a resolution that it would refuse to consider any legislation until the issue of freedom of speech was resolved. Nevertheless, because Deák's clever maneuverings had forged a compromise deal with the government, laws granting the right of serfs to voluntary manumission compensation and the right to address the king in Hungarian, along with steps toward Jewish emancipation and an up-to-date commercial code were passed.

Finally, in May 1840, the government declared an amnesty for political prisoners. The diet disbanded in a spirit of unalloyed joy, accompanied by loud and ostentatious baroque effusions.

98 Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 154, 157, 165–6, 159–60, 161, 158; Berenger and Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie*, 294–5; Gábor Pajkossy, "Deák kettős tükörben. Reformkori jellemzések (1836, 1840)" [Deák in a double mirror: Characterizations from the Age of Reform (1836, 1840)] in Molnár, *Zala követe, Pest képviselője*, 322–45.

99 Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 51–2; Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 158.

100 János Szerencs (ed.), *Az 1839-ik évi országgyűlési jegyzetek* [Notes from the 1839 diet] (Budapest, 1877), 117, 120.

CHAPTER 7

The Hungarian Age of Reform in the 1840s

LAJOS KOSSUTH AND COUNT AURÉL DESSEWFFY: LIBERALS, CONSERVATIVES, AND THE ISSUE OF NATIONALITY

When Lajos Kossuth, coming from a poor noble family in Zemplén County and representing an absentee aristocrat, appeared at the diet in 1832, he was regarded as a nonentity. Within five years, Kossuth's brilliant insight about the importance of disseminating information, first through the Parliamentary Reports and then the Municipal Reports, had made his name. By imprisoning him in 1837, the government unwittingly enhanced his reputation as a key opinion maker and leader in the liberal camp. His years in prison were not wasted. As he himself acknowledged later, they had given him time to read a great deal and to think through the critical issues confronting Hungary.¹ The imprisonment, although curtailing his freedom, was not overly strict. For example, Kossuth was able to receive all the issues of the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, a newspaper favored by the Hungarian opposition. Nevertheless, when he left the prison after three years, he was considered the "victim of the government" and the "martyr of the nation."²

This reputation helped Kossuth to obtain official permission to be editor-in-chief of a new liberal newspaper. Metternich, still smarting from setbacks in foreign policy and wishing to maintain internal stability, thought that it would be better to try controlling Kossuth through censorship than allowing him to function as a totally free agent.³

This maneuver backfired, because, as Pulszky remembered, "Kossuth's *Pesti Hírlap* electrified the country beyond any expectations,"

1 Gábor Pajkossy, "Kossuth és a kormányzati 'terrorizmus' politikája 1835–1839" [Kossuth and the politics of governmental "terrorism" in 1835–1839], *Századok* 128, no. 5 (1994), 811, 813, 815.

2 Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 182, 179.

3 Ibid., 208; Gergely, 184; Gábor Pajkossy, "Lajos Kossuth" in András Gerő (ed.), *Hungarian Liberals* (Budapest, 1999), 132; János Varga, *Keresztútjában a Pesti Hírlap. Az ellenzéki és a közéleti liberalizmus elválása 1841–42-ben* [The *Pesti Hírlap* in a cross-fire: The coming apart of the oppositional and centrist liberalism in 1841–42] (Budapest, 1983), 12–3, 15.

which, in turn, transformed „Kossuth into a great [source of] power, whose influence grew over the counties, the property-owning nobles, the youth, and even over artisans, whose living conditions and work had awakened Kossuth’s interest as well.”⁴ It has become the accepted wisdom to state that the *Pesti Hírlap* signaled the birth of political journalism in Hungary. Journalism had previously existed, but it had been occasional and sporadic, rather than consistently focused on public matters.

Kossuth developed firm ideas that primarily found their way into his editorials, but, beyond this, he became a man totally consumed by politics, much more so than any of his contemporaries. The *Pesti Hírlap* reflected this obsession. Kossuth felt that he had a mission and believed that the question Hungary faced was no longer whether it should progress or stand still, but what direction progress should take and how it should be achieved. In Kossuth’s judgment, the *Pesti Hírlap*, and particularly his editorials, were destined to serve as guides for his compatriots. Kossuth, with a clever use of language, named his editorials *vezércikk*, a translation of the English term “leading article.” In Hungarian, this term could be interpreted as “the article by the leader.” Even though the conservative rival newspaper, *Világ*, had sarcastically coined this formulation stuck to Kossuth and actually benefitted him.⁵

Kossuth’s editorials were paragons of clarity and pathos, so typical of the times, though much less flowery than was customary. “Széchenyi explained, scolded, and taught,” wrote Szekfű, “(while) Kossuth seduced and conquered ... as if he spoke to a united and cultured mass of *citoyens*, who read him in a Parisian coffeehouse.” In addition to advancing cogent arguments furthering liberal causes, Kossuth aimed to expose the various horrors and deficiencies of feudal Hungary, for example, the floggings, torture, and dreadful prison conditions that still characterized the penal system. “We need transparency,” Kossuth declared, adding, “out to the sunshine, gentlemen; sunshine will remedy our problems.”⁶

Although Kossuth was working very hard as the editor and ran a tight professional operation, he subordinated professionalism to the larger aim of recreating, building, and nourishing a liberal network all

4 Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 188–9.

5 Éva Schridde, *A magyar vezércikk első éve* [The first years of the Hungarian editorials] (Pécs, 1938).

6 Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 313; Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 216–8.

across Hungary. Letters by correspondents from various counties and towns added informal but also informative voices to the paper, establishing “a sense of being there to its readers ... broadened public opinion... The unifying experience of the shared themes and the discussion of the reforms slowly moulded the readers into a political community.”⁷ Kossuth’s frequently revealing comments on these reports added to the paper’s informality.

In a courageous and bold move, the noble assembly in Szatmár County passed twelve points on February 22, 1841, which summarized the liberal platform, including the abolition of *aviticitas*, the guilds, and censorship, demands for compulsory manumission with compensation, and the taxing of nobles. The last point became a rallying cry for the poorest segment of the nobility, whose sole identification with their estate was their exemption from paying taxes and who could therefore be easily mobilized in its defense.

Even in Szatmár, the resolution was rescinded in December, 1841. The tone of a letter from Moson County was despondent. “They (the so-called sandaled nobles) showed up with clubs in the chamber hall to destroy the twelve points ... Everything can fall, the nation itself ... Reason and morality are our only weapons, and perhaps, the twelve points would only be modified but survive.” A similar scene took place in Szatmár itself. The majority, shouting that “We will not pay taxes!,” took control of the meeting. The correspondent comforted himself with the thought that “progressive ideas, shared by millions, cannot be eliminated ... and they will persevere ... (Nevertheless) the circumstances of defeat were very distressing.” János Balogh wrote a passionate article about politics in the *Pesti Hírlap*, in which he claimed that division into opposing parties, not “brute force” and not personal invectives and insults, was salutary.⁸

A correspondent wrote from Szeged that youth from the town was prepared to report to Kossuth, who indignantly remarked, “Why do you think that only young people send reports to me?” A correspondent from Szabadka was positively giddy. “See, gentlemen, we are starting to wake up ... and move, move forward, rather than backwards, but any move is better than stagnation.” A correspondent from Liptó County complained that the paper did not discuss civic affairs in

7 Gergely, 185–6.

8 *Pesti Hírlap*, January 20, January 16, April 21, 1842.

his county. Kossuth wryly responded that “then perhaps you can help out in this regard.”

Not all reports were laudatory or even optimistic. One from Nyitra County claimed that “there is no public spirit here, no spirit at all ... our young jurists read nothing and are unfamiliar with the ideas of the times.” In contrast, a correspondent from Győr happily reported that the knowledge of Hungarian was spreading in his town. To a complaint from Debrecen about the proliferation of pharmacies, Kossuth gave a lesson in free-market economics. “Competition is good. The bad, more expensive and neglectful pharmacies will go out of business, and the better, cheaper, and more industrious ones will survive.” To the report from the town of Szatmár-Németi about the successful assimilation of two Jewish innkeepers, Kossuth remarked that “this fine example of Christian values and enlightened humanism is very pleasing, though it is painful that the town of Szatmár stands alone in this regard.”⁹

Other articles contrasted the contemptible behavior of the aristocracy with those who were defending the “poor, the people, the masses,” elevating journalism to the level of virtue and justice, and taking part in the formation of associations. One condemned rowdy behavior, even though the perpetrators were known liberals. The number of subscribers in the early 1840s was around 4,700. While this was not a large number, popular newspapers or journals were often shared by readers.¹⁰

The magic of the *Pesti Hírlap* radiated not only from Kossuth’s outstanding writing style and his correspondents’ reports, but also from the lively columns under the title, “Novelties from the Capital,” written by Adolf Frankenburg. Rapid economic development and social differentiation were transforming Buda-Pest, two separate towns that Széchenyi in the mid-1830s was still describing as Buda-Pest’s Dust and Mud¹¹ into a bustling budding metropolis of over 150,000 by the late 1840s.¹² Adolf Frankenburg’s columns reflected the vitality that infused the towns, especially Pest. His columns were partly patriotic

9 *Pesti Hírlap*, February 20, March 3, April 21, September 18, November 6, November 10, November 17, 1842.

10 *Pesti Hírlap*, January 27, February 10, May 26, August 11, 1842; Kókay (ed.), *A magyar sajtó története*, 246.

11 Count István Széchenyi, *Buda-Pesti Por és Sár* [Buda-Pest of dust and mud] (Pest, 1834).

12 Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (DeKalb, 2005), 70; Letter of Robert Nemes to the author, September 4, 2010.

exhortations with a liberal slant and partly sarcastic comments and attacks on rival newspapers or the authorities, very much in line with a changing and much less staid urban culture. Indeed, these columns were perhaps the first manifestations of a yellow press in Hungary. Frankenburg himself boasted about how merciless he was, how he had over a hundred reliable informers, and how adversaries tried to bribe him with offers of money and women. He nevertheless credited his influence in part to Kossuth's prestige. In his columns, Frankenburg wrote about the dreadful drainage system in the city, a scandal in the National Theater, the need to use publicity for serving the people, the baselessness of scurrilous attacks against the *Pesti Hírlap* by its rival *Világ*, and a Turkish diplomat in Pest, who had missed a steamship by half an hour. The latter claimed that his instructions obliged him always to arrive half an hour late. "We [in Hungary]," Frankenburg bitterly commented, "are late half a century."¹³

Count Aurél Dessewffy, József's oldest son, was brought up by his father to be a refined cultured gentleman, equally at home in the family's library, government offices, and aristocratic salons. Regarded by friend and foe alike as brilliant, he became "the most significant and only serious opponent of Kossuth."¹⁴ Dessewffy was certainly the most intelligent and articulate spokesman of a tendency long known among moderate conservatives, that is, how to attempt to reach a compromise between preserving the essential aspects of the status quo and allowing for concessions to a rapidly changing world. His meteoric career reached its climax as the editor of *Világ* in 1841, but was cruelly cut off by his death in 1842 at the age of 34. Even Deák, who opposed his views, remarked that, had Dessewffy lived longer, he would have been "at the center of the government's party as its soul and creator."¹⁵

Part of Dessewffy's impact rested in a certain logic of his argument. Was it true, he asked, that the aristocracy stubbornly opposed reforms and the government was oppressive and undermined the constitution? Dessewffy had his doubts. According to him, "we have a great deal of freedom on the path to fulfilment." He claimed that the real troublestemmed from the fact that "we act on important issues precipitately...

13 Adolf Frankenburg, *Emlékiratok* [Memoirs], 3 volumes (Pest, 1868), 2: 121–2, 126, 124; *Pesti Hírlap*, January 23, February 27, March 10, May 29, May 12, 1842.

14 Kókay (ed.), *A magyar sajtó története*, 741.

15 November 27, 1844, Deák to Wesselényi, *Deák Ferenc emlékezete*, 146.

subject to enthusiasm, a dangerous move in legislative matters.” Better guides to action would be “deliberation (and) sober politics, because they would honor our national dignity.” What counted in Hungary, Dessewffy argued, should not necessarily be the so-called “popular ideas,” often accompanied by a certain “moral terrorism,” and a great deal of “noise... inexhaustible verbosity and voraciousness in pursuing political issues,” which clearly aim at enhancing their popularity.¹⁶

This debate was not about principles of government, but about the means of reaching concrete goals, and Dessewffy failed to present balanced arguments. For example, he demanded that landowners should be fully compensated if they allow their serfs’ manumission. Anything less would be “judicial robbery ... a terrible loss for the country’s economy.” In fact, such a demand would have totally bankrupted the serfs, making this suggestion unrealizable. In another part of his book, he condemned attacks against property owners that would “annoy them.” He was adamant in preserving the system of “jus aviticum” as well. Even the most moderate liberals opposed these opinions.¹⁷

Nor was Dessewffy shy in expressing his wholehearted support for the government, even at the expense of county autonomy, provided that the power of the government was truly efficient, rather than merely nominal. These views of Dessewffy limited his impact, as even his hagiographer admitted. According to Farkas Deák, “many of his friends understood and liked what he was saying, but (they asked) was Dessewffy not a ‘pecsoviscs’?” which was a derogatory nickname for government supporters.¹⁸

Dessewffy, a moderate conservative, stayed within the broad confines of constitutionalism. He, unlike József Ponorí-Thewrewk, was not totally antagonistic towards all reforms; he conceded the nobles’ obligation to pay taxes and also a modest extension of the suffrage. Nevertheless, at least at some point in his life, Dessewffy seemed to have grown disgusted with the new world around him. His poem, written

16 Aurél Dessewffy, *X.Y.Z. könyv* [X.Y.Z. book] (Pest, 1841), 11–3, 14–5.

17 Schlett, *A magyar politikai gondolkodás története*, 2: 275.

18 Ibid., 22, 181, 170; Gergely, 200; Iván Zoltán Dénes, “A magyar konzervatívok társadalomszemlélete az 1840-es években” [The view of society by the Hungarian conservatives in the 1840s] in Szabad, *A polgárosodás útján*, 442–3; Farkas Deák, *Gróf Dessewffy Aurél életrajza* [The biography of Count Aurél Dessewffy] (Pozsony, 1885), 14.

in 1841 and posthumously published in 1887, listed all the wrongs Dessewffy was observing, which included “love of money, love of pleasures, craving for the limelight, forced magyarization, robbing one man so to give it to another, violating existing laws because we do not like them, creating new ones and then disobeying them, the urge to win at any price, hating torture but not when it is done in writings, bribing people at elections, and using brute force. ... All these are parts of the *Zeitgeist*.”¹⁹ It is no wonder, then, that Dessewffy, for all his brilliance, was incapable of “raising people’s hopes in a better future.”²⁰ Kossuth, on the other hand, was successful in doing precisely that.

As long as Dessewffy carried the torch for moderate conservatives, his supreme intelligence, boldness, and rational arguments did make him a worthy opponent for Kossuth, because Dessewffy was fearless, decisive, and clear about what he supported and what he rejected. However, this so-called neo-conservative attitude was shot through with ambiguities. After all, apart from feeling the pressure from both sides to take stands on concrete political objectives, it was necessary at some point to decide to become part of the movement for reforms or to turn against it. Many contemporaries evaded this choice, wavering and equivocating because it was attractive to appear on the side of progress, while essentially rejecting any reasonable means of achieving it. The best of both worlds, many thought, was engaging in a future-oriented, imaginary universe without abandoning the sense of permanence, rooted in longstanding political structures, and their own current self-interest.

At times, this self-interest was blatantly displayed; at other times, it was camouflaged by quasi-progressive rhetoric. Some genuine attempts at reconciling the old and the new were undoubtedly made. These categories were sometimes jumbled together in the same article. The Tories of England, Sir Robert Peel in particular, were portrayed in one article as models. What most attracted the author of the article was the Tory tendency to leave “the innermost essence of state and society intact ... and allow piety felt for old institutions to moderate the necessary yearning for the new.”²¹

Among the leaders of the group of Hungarian conservatives, Count Albert Sztáray was most outspoken. “I wish to keep the influence of

¹⁹ *Hazánk* 7, no. 1 (1887), 76.

²⁰ Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 210.

²¹ *Világ*, April 20, 1842.

the aristocracy," he wrote, "excluding those who are ill-qualified. It is the party of disorder that wishes to expand the franchise, whose followers, having no judgment, blindly follow their leaders. I also wish to keep the masses in check and under tutelage, promoting their material progress and educational development, but not wasting their time as partners in running the country, WHICH they would not be capable of doing." In another article in *Világ*, the anonymous author ridiculed progress as a mere slogan, which was becoming ubiquitous. Nevertheless, the moderate conservatives' rhetoric advocated furthering progress while emphasizing the need to use intellect, rather than "nice-sounding phrases and emotions." The author then tried to square the circle, declaring that "although we will change things less, we will progress further ... the means to accomplish this have to be morally good."

In another article, an anonymous author expressed the opinion that the opposition to the twelve points of Szatmár did not exclude agreement between the two camps on certain points. Rather, the opposition arose because of the "demanding manner" of the resolution and its intention to expand the counties' sphere of authority. Along this line, another article accused the liberals and specifically *Pesti Hírlap* "of undermining the nation's nervous system." The conservative ambivalence about progress was frequently repeated. "No doubt that progress should be the slogan of the cautious, as well: the question is which road to take; can we preserve the constitution, or must we remove parts of it?," wrote one contributor. "We do respect our constitution so much that we find it impossible to detect that any obstacle [to progress] may be in it," another declared. "We find that stagnation equals the death of the nation," stated another author, "so we, too, advocate progress; but preferably fifty or a hundred years from now, without wounding the nation and exposing the calm life of the citizenry and the legal order to danger in too great a hurry." The editor commented on this last statement that "we are saying it bravely: whoever does not feel this way is not a good Magyar."²²

The combination of the liberals' firm and straightforward message, albeit threatening to many, and the ambiguities of the moderate conservatives, with all their caveats, produced an ideologically grey

22 *Világ*, January 8, February 23, March 19, March 26, April 6, October 1, November 30, 1842.

no man's land, where indeterminacy and confusion reigned. "We respect our constitution," a correspondent to *Világ* from Ung County wrote, "owe homage to our ruler and laws, preserve our liberties ... love our Lord Lieutenant as sons love their fathers ... we know each other well, discuss issues without rancor ... we like *Pesti Hírlap* but we also like *Világ*."²³

Indeed, the lines of demarcation between the opposing camps were not yet always sharp. Perhaps the memoirs of Baron Ferenc Fiáth provide the best example of vacillation and subterfuges, as well as a certain fluidity among political positions. The young baron, born into a prominent family in Veszprém County, learned early to enjoy himself. He loved to party and to hunt, and not even the customary drudgery of studying law put a stop to his various amusements. He came of age in the mid-1830s and made a point of writing that "we [the nobles] were not engaged in politics;" rather, families visited each other and socialized. He was a Catholic and conversed with other men in Hungarian, but women in his social circle did not speak the language, unlike in Calvinist families where the conversation was Hungarian among both men and women. He then went to Pest to study law, an endeavor that offered a free and enjoyable life for a young aristocrat. Visiting Pozsony during the 1832–1836 diet, he paid scant attention to the proceedings. "If there were any politics," he remembered, "it was purely personal."

By the late 1830s, his interest in politics awakening, Baron Fiáth became a moderate liberal, "a man of progress," in his own words, with one limitation. He was horrified by the idea of a revolution and "could not imagine a worse crime than that." Although critical of those who were subservient to the government, he was loyal to the Habsburg dynasty: he argued for gradual progress without any violence. Fiáth was elected a delegate to the 1839–40 and then to the 1843–44 diets, although much of his time was again dedicated to his amusements. Still, he was impressed by Kossuth and even more so by Széchenyi, who by then had come to be identified with the conservatives. Fiáth changed sides, at least partly because the conservatives were in the majority in Fejér County. "To serve there was very pleasant and easy for me," Fiáth commented.

23 *Világ*, May 28, 1842.

In fact, Fiáth did become a staunch conservative, who was upset that the liberals blamed the conservatives for the meager results of the 1843–1844 diet. Fiáth received the reward for his loyalty: he was appointed court councilor in 1845 and court chamberlain in 1846. At no point in his memoirs can the slightest trace of agonizing over his having changed sides be detected. The truth is that, in his own mind, he probably never did. What is likely to have happened, following Széchenyi's trajectory, was Fiáth's participation in the delicate balancing act between preserving the old and needing to change, shading into gradually favoring the former, but not completely ignoring the latter.²⁴

No vacillation or ambiguity in the politics of *Nemzeti Újság*, which represented the archconservative segment of mostly those who were closely allied with the Catholic Church, can be found. Yet, even Mihály Kovacsóczy, who was its editor in 1842, felt the need to pay at least lip service to the idea of progress. "We believe in progress, but without agitation and in conjunction with religion and legality," he wrote. What was progress to Kovacsóczy? "A result that comes from making both individuals and institutions better, more beautiful, more noble, and more perfect... and that will emerge from the people's inner soul without damaging existing laws," he stated, adding that "we will not flatter the aristocracy if it pursues a selfish role at the expense of others, but we will not flatter democracy, either, because we know that, without authority, the masses are inclined towards license, unruliness, and brute force ... and become the victims of demagogues," a clear reference to Kossuth.²⁵

Some ultra-conservatives did not even bother to care, or, at best, only minimally did so, about progress. István Éliássy, a lawyer attached to the Prince Esterházy, delivered a devastating portrayal of Hungary. To him, "envy" was the principal culprit. Those in its grips were unlawfully conspiring to appropriate ancient estates and to undermine "sacred customs" and laws based on unflinching faith and now exposed to the "poison of fashionable indifference." Even "the peaceful calm of the tax-paying people" was being disturbed by damaging agitation, as the poisonous stings were turning the simple serfs off the path of

24 Baron Ferenc Fiáth, *Életem és élményeim* [My life and experiences], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1878), 1: 57, 61, 96, 123, 145, 146, 148, 158, 198, 203, 239; 2: 41, 52, 66.

25 *Nemzeti Újság* 46, June 1842.

obedience in order to gather them under the banner of irreligion and sedition. Equality between people was an absurdity, yet this was what reforms originating from abroad were advocating. Their promoters were not advancing the country's happiness by their deeds, but were only mouthing slogans. Any old man who was defending the country's venerable constitution was to be cast aside as "not this century's man." Inexperienced young men were becoming infatuated with foreign reforms, chasing after "blind notions." Éliássy exhorted his readers to resist "the radicals' intrigues with God's help. Yes, we should progress, but not against our ancient constitution, faith, and by disturbing the social peace."²⁶

Kossuth became the primary target of both the moderate and more extreme conservatives. Although Kovacsóczy admitted that he enjoyed listening to Kossuth's speeches, his judgment was otherwise severe. He characterized Kossuth as the coachman who had not learned how to drive a coach; all heart and no brain, Kossuth was a potential despot. Were he to come to power, he would unite people, but he would also cut off the head of anyone who disagreed with him. Széchenyi, who came to despise Kossuth, would probably have concurred. To conservatives of all kinds, Kossuth became the symbol of a dangerous and possibly fatal radicalism, which was dragging the country to its ruin. These opinions definitely contained an element of class antagonism. In the eyes of most aristocrats, including Széchenyi, Kossuth personified the upstart lawyers from the lower nobility, who sounded loud and demanding. "Their [apparent] radicalism hurt Széchenyi's highly-developed sense of aristocratic pride." Count Aurél Dessewffy called the very same group "the committed travelers of Hungarian radicalism."²⁷ Although understandable from a human point of view in a

26 István Éliássy, *Hunnia a haladás korszakában* [Hunnia in the Age of Progress] (Eger, 1842), VII, IX, XII, XIII, 106. Three years later, Éliássy published a play that attempted to destroy the reputation of the United States, decrying among other aspects its diversity, resulting in "chaotic conflicts." This view was running contrary to the generally admiring opinion that the United States enjoyed among moderate conservatives and liberals alike. Géza Závodszy, *Az Amerika-motívum és a polgárosodó Magyarország a kezdetől 1848-ig* [The American model and a developing Hungary from the beginnings to 1848] (Budapest, 1992), 243, 140, 144, 145, 147, 148, 168, 182–3, 184–7, 193, 203–5, 209, 219.

27 Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 285.

feudal society, these snobbish attitudes further limited the political effectiveness of conservative aristocrats.

Ironically, although Kossuth did grow more radical by the end of the decade, he had been no radical at all during the early and mid-1840s. As late as 1843, he was still firmly convinced that the leadership of his country belonged to the untitled nobility. "Throughout centuries," he wrote in a lead article, "they have been the focus of enthusiasm," adding, "why shouldn't we hope that they will conform to the noble trend that our age demands?" He concluded the article on a high note, writing "that this is why I believe in a peaceful transformation." In another article, also written in 1843, Kossuth rejected the accusation that he wished to transform "our monarchic-aristocratic constitution into a democratic one, though our aim has been ... to grant space and influence for the people," leaving the nobles in charge under the rubric of the "identity of interests."²⁸

Nor was Kossuth out of the mainstream on the issue of nationalism, which was "neither original, nor was it extraordinary," in István Deák's judgment. Kossuth, with his excellent political instincts, registered the dynamic nature of nationalism that had become universal in mid-nineteenth century Europe, including the Habsburg Monarchy, where "the surge of nationalist sentiment" reigned.²⁹ Kossuth understood that political nationalism, while not necessarily supplanting but prevailing over cultural nationalism, had but one aim, the creation of a nation. This in turn, would be unimaginable without making Hungarian the official language of the state, the most significant marker of national existence, "a maxim in our century," in Kossuth's words.³⁰ He nevertheless opposed forced magyarization and granted the right of the ethnic minorities to speak their own language in their private lives, but never as the starting point of a movement for national autonomy. Kossuth was especially adamant in rejecting Slovak claims. He publicly supported Count Károly Zay, the Inspector General of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, who was the proponent of a radical nationalism, aiming at the total assimilation of Slovaks, in particular. However, *Pesti Hírlap* made it clear that it opposed the destruction of native langu-

²⁸ Quoted in Gábor Pajkossy (ed.), *Kossuth Lajos* (Budapest, 1998), 53; *Pesti Hírlap*, December 7, 1843; Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 221–2.

²⁹ Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 44–5; Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 121.

³⁰ Quoted in Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 233.

ages and cultures in the private sphere. Kossuth shared the universal feeling among liberals that Hungary was threatened primarily by the Slavs, supported by a hostile Tsarist Russia. This idea that Herder had first propagated was revisited by Wolfgang Berg, who, in his pamphlet published in 1842, repeated Herder's argument about the hopelessness of Hungary's situation, encircled by non-Magyars in all directions. According to Berg, "Hungary, covered with corpses, will either become a province of Russia or a colony of Germany."³¹

Kossuth and the other liberals found the antidotes to this threat in two sources. One was constitutional liberalism in Hungary, which would, so they hoped, attract even the non-Magyars, and the other was a prospective alliance with liberals in certain German states. Wesselényi expressed similar ideas in his 1843 pamphlet, "Appeal. On the matter of the Magyar and Slav nationalities." The difference between Kossuth and Wesselényi existed in tone, not in content. While Kossuth approached the issue with calm rationality, Wesselényi's voice bordered on the hysterical. "My country, my nation," he exclaimed, "your existence is at stake; wake up, or you will perish!"³²

The misunderstandings and ambiguities embedded in strong ideological currents may be unraveled only by posterity, because those living in their midst often think and act according to their own deeply entrenched and preconceived ideas and prejudices and possess only a skewed picture of their surrounding realities. For example, the Hungarian liberals were unaware of their own ambivalence, which derived from the combination of pride in an often glorious and heroic past and their simultaneous fears and anxieties, stemming from their nation's isolation.³³ They also confounded two different approaches. To enhance the strength of Magyar nationalism, they employed the highly

31 Ibid., 241; János Varga, *Helyet kereső Magyarország. Politikai eszmék és koncepciók az 1840-és évek elején* [Hungary in search for its place: Political ideas and conceptions at the beginning of the 1840s] (Budapest, 1982), 56, 66; quoted in András Gergely, "Kossuth és a német egység" [Kossuth and German unity] in Mária Orosz (ed.), *Magyar évszázadok. Tanulmányok Kosáry Domokos 90. születésnapjára* [Hungarian centuries: Studies in honor of Domokos Kosáry's 90th birthday] (Budapest, 2003), 186.

32 Baron Miklós Wesselényi, *Szózat. A magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében* [Appeal: On the matter of the Magyar and Slav nationalities] (Leipzig, 1843), 97.

33 Evans, "Der ungarische Nationalismus im internationalen Vergleich," 297.

emotional tools of romantic nationalism, but, when they counseled the non-Magyars, they relied on the rational arguments of liberalism. This counsel worked, at best, with would-be assimilants, but it could not extinguish the equally romantic manifestations of non-Magyar nationalisms, which had their own inherent excesses.

These manifestations were the logical consequences of transformation from a “hungarus” mentality to self-conscious nationalism, even if the transformation was limited at the beginning only to small intellectual elites. This was evident even in such a moderate pamphlet written by the Slovak Pavel Tomasik, under the pseudonym, Pál Békésy. Although he advocated reconciliation between Magyars and Slavs, he declared “magyarization” an impossibility. Another pamphlet was more militant. Responding to Károly Zay, who wished to unite Calvinists and Lutherans in one church in order to use Protestantism as a means of assimilating the non-Magyars, József (Joseph) Melczer, a Lutheran pastor from Zólyom (Zvolen/Altsohl), firmly declared, “Each nation’s Protestantism stands on the cultivation of its own language and its free use, Magyar with the Magyars, German with the Germans, and Slovak with the Slovaks.”³⁴

Although preconceived notions and prejudices on the Hungarian side dominated the issue of Hungarian non-Magyar relations, voices to the contrary were also heard. Széchenyi’s speech in the Academy of Sciences on November 27, 1842, was a case in point. He thought that it was his duty to clarify concepts, avoiding “warped logic.” Széchenyi was not worried about the small number of Hungarians; he claimed that quality mattered more than quantity. Rather, Hungarians were in danger, because their spiritual importance was so slight. He acknowledged the just nature and necessity of making Hungarian the language of public administration and believed in the essential unity of the nation. At the same time, Széchenyi was adamant about stressing the ideas of justice and moral superiority, which would rule out the practice of forced magyarization. He strongly repudiated superficial and excessive Hungarian nationalism. Both Pulszky and Wesselényi predictably attacked him. In his memoirs, Pulszky proudly quoted at length from

34 Pál Békésy (Pavel Tomasik), *A nyelvbéke Magyarországon* [The linguistic peace in Hungary] (Lőcse, 1843), 3; József Melczer, *Szózat a szláv nyelv érdekében* [Appeal on behalf of the Slav language] (Besztercebánya, 1842), 15–6.

an article that he had written in *Pesti Hírlap*, accusing Széchenyi of unfairly slandering the nation. The liberal consensus on this issue was so strong that only non-Magyars spoke up in Széchenyi's defense.³⁵

In vain did Ferenc Kállay, member of the Academy, point out the religious and cultural differences among Slavs that would make it impossible for the putative threat by a united "Pan-Slav front" to materialize, a view also mentioned in the conservative *Világ*. Furthermore, Ferenc Kubinyi, a delegate to the 1843–44 diet, in recommending Wesselényi's "Szózat" to his colleagues, could find no more tangible example of Russian incitement than the publication of a Slovak almanac in the town of Liptószentmárton (Martinček).³⁶ However, neither Széchenyi's idealistic high moral ground, nor these counter-indications of a more practical nature succeeded in alleviating Hungarian fears and anxieties. Pride in distant heroism of the past had been so weighed down by memories of more recent defeats and national humiliations that deeply entrenched insecurities could be and were magnified to the point of contemplating the specter of the nation's death. Herder's and Berg's dire predictions deepened these insecurities, and the presence of a mighty and absolutistic Russian Empire, with its presumed connections to fellow Slavs in the Habsburg Monarchy, loomed ever larger and more menacing. All of these situations strongly colored many Hungarians' collective imagination, already inflamed by romantic passions.

THE SZÉCHENYI–KOSSUTH DEBATE

This debate between Széchenyi and Kossuth was the focus of animated interest among politically and intellectually active Hungarians during the early 1840s. Already in 1841, Aurél Dessewffy thought that "a whole small literature is discussing this debate."³⁷ Széchenyi entered

35 István Széchenyi, *A magyar Akadémia körül* [On the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] (Budapest, 1981), 11, 24, 37, 40, 43, 44, 47, 54; Pulszky, *Életem és korom*, 1: 190–1; Csorba, *Széchenyi István*, 141.

36 Ferenc Kállay, *A Szózat kritikai bírálata* [The critique of "Szózat"] (Pest, 1843), 19, 34, 38; *Világ*, August 27, 1842; Ferenc Kovács (ed.), *Az 1843/44-ik évi magyar országgyűlési alsó tábla kerületi üléseinek naplója* [The proceedings of the Lower House of the 1843–44 diet], 6 volumes (Budapest, 1894), 5: 79–80.

37 Quoted in Dessewffy, *X.Y.Z. könyv*, 38; July 18, 1841.

this debate with less than his usual mental concentration. His genuine fears for his nation, dread of a revolution and a concomitant break with Austria and the Habsburgs, and, last but not least, loathing of Kossuth led him to positions that were, in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, both incoherent and untimely. First and foremost, it made no sense for Széchenyi to claim that he essentially agreed with Kossuth and the direction of *Pesti Hírlap* and was only opposing Kossuth's manners and then to accuse Kossuth of "throwing his nation into confusion" and leading it to its ruin.³⁸ This discrepancy puzzled many contemporaries, even such liberals as Eötvös and Deák, who were moderates by temperament, though not in their ultimate objectives. Eötvös agreed with Széchenyi that the debate was not about substance but tactics, but, if that were the case, what was causing all the hatred?

After all, "*Pesti Hírlap* was an arena for discussion, rather than its guiding light," and, as such, would not lead the nation "into the vortex of anarchy," Eötvös believed. Deák also tried to persuade Széchenyi not to fight Kossuth, especially because, as Deák wrote to Wesselényi, "I found no cause for concern, not even about the manners of *Pesti Hírlap*." Széchenyi appeared to Deák to be out of control, likely to suspect even Deák himself, a paragon of judicious moderation, as a potential revolutionary "who would kill the country's liberty and swamp peaceful citizens with bloodshed." Even Gusztáv Szontágh, in an article in *Jelenkor*, a newspaper generally supportive of Széchenyi, described conditions in Hungary as "grave but not dangerous," a contrasting view to Széchenyi's gloomy prognosis.³⁹

To Eötvös, the timing of Széchenyi's attack was also a blunder. Apart from unnecessarily fomenting discord, the debate diverted attention from pursuing concrete plans for reforms. "The nation is at a crossroads, woe to us if we allow this moment to pass," Eötvös wrote. He declared that "the main thing is that we should not stay idle ... [merely] patching up reforms could lead to harmful consequences."

38 István Széchenyi, "A kelet népe" [The people of the Orient] in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 298–9, 292–3, 319.

39 József Eötvös, *Reform és hazafiság. Publicisztikai írások* [Reform and patriotism: Writings in newspapers and journals] (Budapest, 1978), 265–6; originally published as *Kelet népe és a Pesti Hírlap* [The people of the Orient and *Pesti Hírlap*; May, 1846]; Deák to Baron Miklós Wesselényi, October 12, 1841, in *Deák Ferenc emlékezete*, 82–3; *Jelenkor*, April 6, 1843.

It is important to place this debate within the context of its time and to avoid the temptation to condemn Kossuth for his ever-more radical stands, which did eventually facilitate and guide the 1848 revolution and the War of Independence against Austria, ending in the disastrous defeat of 1849. The writer Zsigmond Kemény delivered just such a bitter denunciation of Kossuth, published in 1850. "Kossuth was a gambler in politics, who incessantly bid higher and higher, because (the applause) of the gallery was indispensable to him," Kemény wrote, "and he needed the fanaticism of the audience in order to keep those in check who wished to break away from him."⁴⁰

This exaggerated attack ignored the fact that, during the early to mid-1840s, Kossuth repudiated any thought of a revolution, calling it an "absurdity." He even recoiled from the noisy tumults caused by young associates at the diets, expressing serious doubts about whether these tumults justified the comparison made between the diets and the French National Convention. While the Széchenyi–Kossuth debate captured the attention of a wide range of liberals, it was less important than the division between these two men and those who were defending the structures and practices of the past. According to Kosáry, the principal dispute during the Age of Reform was conducted between advocates of the obsolete old order and promoters of the nascent new. Both Széchenyi and Kossuth belonged to the latter, and "in spite of their bitter polemics, they were moving in the same direction."⁴¹ At the same time, adherents of the old order were increasingly and fearfully on the defensive. Indeed, for all the frustrations that liberals experienced and for all the divisions among them, each successive diet was moving forward the cause of reforms.

How the reforms were promoted, by whom, and in what form had therefore become the truly critical questions in the 1840s. This was evident to most keen contemporary observers. Although Aurél Dessewffy sympathized with Széchenyi and shared in his fellow aristocrat's disdain for Kossuth, he admitted that the kind of "scientific certainty" that infused Széchenyi's thinking was beyond the comprehension of most people. For them, Dessewffy recognized, Kossuth's proposed changes

40 Lajos Kossuth, *Felelet Gróf Széchenyi Istvánnak* [Response to Count István Széchenyi] (Pest, 1841), 11; Zsigmond Kemény, *Forradalom után* [After the revolution] (Pest, 1850), 214.

41 Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 286.

“from the bottom up” made much more sense, though Dessewffy feared that the results of “agitation” could not be foreseen. According to him, although Széchenyi had isolated himself by neglecting Hungary’s county life, his anguish and charges were largely correct. Dessewffy further agreed with Széchenyi in condemning what he called Kossuth’s “lack of piety, indifference toward past traditions, cold individualism, self-love, and ... flattery of passions.”⁴²

Dessewffy was apparently dissatisfied not with Széchenyi’s arguments, but, rather, with his lofty and impractical ways of handling them. Dessewffy’s conservative bias undoubtedly twisted Kossuth’s motivations and character beyond recognition, but this does not mean that Kossuth was blameless. In spite of his protestations to the contrary, even some of his friends thought that those years in prison had made Kossuth vain. Nor were his political views as logical and rational in every detail as he thought them to be. He romanticized the counties, writing that “I would not exchange them for any [other] institution of the world,” and had boundless faith in the promise of liberalism. “I believe that human perfectibility is infinite,” Kossuth wrote at one point. He was the child of his age, carried away, like so many others, by the romantic passions of liberal nationalism. In his case, the sober warning of Aurél Dessewffy, when he predicted that the enthusiasm generated by an agitator could take a course quite contrary to the agitator’s original intentions, had merit. As far as we know, the possibility of such an outcome never entered the mind of Lajos Kossuth.⁴³

The majority of liberals, Kossuth at their lead, seemingly had no qualms or doubts. They were certain that they had the *Zeitgeist* on their side, functioning as a kind of steam that was inexorably pushing forward their locomotive, a frequently used metaphor. The simple, straightforward message about the necessity of becoming inclusive and enlarging the number of people participating in the political process, thereby creating a nation, was repeated mantra-like by all Hungarian liberals in the 1840s.

Eötvös was clear that he and his liberal friends could not tolerate any longer the fact “that part of the nation should bend in chains under

42 Dessewffy, *X.Y.Z. könyv*, 43, 51, 52, 53, 55, 45, 47.

43 June 23, 1841, Lackó, *Széchenyi és Kossuth vitája*, 162; Kossuth, *Felelet*, 33, 41; Dessewffy, *X.Y.Z. könyv*, 43.

those, who, in order to maintain their tyrannical authority, wish to keep that system going.” He defined “whoever expands the blessings of the constitution to all the country’s citizens” as a “man of progress.” Deák shared the same idea and felt the same urgency. He thought that only the identity of interests, the earliest possible expansion of political rights, could save the country from ruin. Kossuth himself urged his countrymen to “let us lift up into liberty’s redoubt many more. Liberty is not being diminished if it is shared with others; [on the contrary] it grows and becomes stronger.”⁴⁴

Although in the polarized and frequently vicious political atmosphere of Hungary in the 1840s, the liberals carried their own share of biases against their conservative adversaries, the assumption that they were on the forward-moving side of history made them cautiously optimistic and somewhat less prickly. The liberals proved this by their relatively gentle treatment of Széchenyi. Kossuth, in his “Felelet,” certainly treated Széchenyi with respect, but this did not mean agreement. He did think that Széchenyi “regards the nation’s future as a great game of chess” and also likened him to a physician who was convinced that only he knew what ailed his nation and what the precise cure for that ailment was.

For all the respect that Széchenyi had earned, he was regarded by most liberals as someone who, “taking up the mantle of Providence, got himself into foreign territory,” as Kossuth described him. In the eyes of the petty nobility, Széchenyi’s portrait was one of an “arrogant grand seigneur.” Indeed, by hoping to keep out any discussion on relations between Austria and Hungary and by treating the counties and the untitled nobility with contempt, Széchenyi managed to exclude himself from exerting a lasting impact on his country’s agenda, with the exception of the plan of taxation that he proposed in 1843. Széchenyi’s depression did not deter him from engaging in feverish activities, always on his own terms, but most of his projects, valuable as they were, fragmented into individual pieces. In historical perspective, it appears that Kossuth stood on firmer political grounds, presented concrete comprehensive programs, and attracted growing popular support. The contest was uneven.

44 Eötvös, *Reform és hazafiság*, 286, 341; Kossuth, *Felelet*, 25; Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 61.

THE 1843–44 DIET

Excitement and a great deal of suspense and expectation preceded the opening of the diet in May 1843. All the political forces had prepared for it, and legislative proposals were ready in record large numbers.⁴⁵ The liberals clearly had the momentum, but they confronted a problem that proved to be their partial undoing. On the one hand, their ranks contained some of the best and most learned minds in Hungary; on the other hand, it was precisely this kind of lofty excellence that created a huge chasm between this relatively small but illustrious group and the masses of uneducated and deeply conservative sandal-wearing nobles, who cared primarily about preserving their privileges, especially the tax-exemption separating them from the serfs. Some of them, literally sharpening their weapons, were prepared to commit violence, while some eminent jurists from the elite group met independently to draw up a truly outstanding proposal for reforming Hungarian penal law. The commission, under Deák's leadership, accepted the concept of equality before the law, allowed appeals, and proposed to abolish the death penalty and corporal punishments, along with eliminating the manorial courts, which had long invited arbitrariness by landowners. Such advanced notions awakened interest elsewhere in Europe. Conservatives in the commission agreed with these proposed changes, but they rejected Deák's attempt to introduce a jury system and balked at placing curbs on the sovereign's right to prosecute cases of treason.⁴⁶

At the same time, crude forms of electioneering, which included making prospective voters drunk, bribing them with money, and using violence on occasion, were taking place in many counties. The contemporary liberal historian, Mihály Horváth, put the onus for all these actions on the conservatives, but also regretfully admitted, with what appears to have been a rather lame excuse, that the liberals were employing those very same means, because "they were forced to for the sake of winning."⁴⁷

45 István Kajtár, "Modernizációk és Európa. Adalékok a politikai vitakultúrához az 1843/44-es rendi országgyűlésen" [Modernization and Europe: Contributions to the political culture of debates at the 1843–1844 diet] in Gábor Máthé and János Zlinszky (eds.), *Degré Alajos emlékkönyv* [Memorial volume in honor of Alajos Degré] (Budapest, 1995), 121.

46 Gergely, 207–8.

47 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történelméből*, 2: 379.

The most famous episode took place in Zala County where, as everybody in Hungary expected, the much-esteemed Ferenc Deák was to be elected as one of Zala's two delegates. To great surprise, a certain György Forintos, responding to the Bishop of Veszprém's urging, mobilized the sandal-wearing nobles. Although Deák was elected, the instructions given to him lacked the demand for the abolition of the nobles' tax exemption. Under this limitation, Deák refused the honor of representing Zala. His reputation was such that nobody stepped up to take his place. Violence accompanied the follow-up election, and Deák was again chosen, but he declined, this time because of the violence. In the judgment of his biographers, Deák was already pessimistic about the prospects that the diet would accept his version of the liberal penal code and the abolition of the nobles' tax exemption. In fact, corrupt electioneering was as much a pretext as the immediate cause for his abrupt retirement. His letter to Kossuth, a month before the diet, in which he complained about "the failure of our sacred cause," seems to prove the point.⁴⁸

Indeed, most reform proposals were defeated by a combination of strong resistance to them, even in the Lower Chamber—the abolition of the nobles' tax exemption was included in the instruction to delegates in only 19 counties—and by the phalanx of conservative aristocrats and Catholic prelates, constituting the majority in the Upper Chamber. Széchenyi advanced a sensible tax proposal that Kossuth also endorsed, yet it failed, as did the penal reform. The Upper Chamber rejected the idea of juries, and the government's effort to increase the number of reliable delegates from the towns also failed. It was indeed absurd that, as these towns were becoming larger and more prosperous, their combined influence at the diets remained negligible. In this case, however, the liberals refused to concede unless the towns were willing to reform and end the stranglehold conservative patricians had over running the towns.

The result of this particular political wrangling was that nothing happened at the end. Efforts to advance Jewish emancipation also remained unsuccessful. A symbolic victory was achieved by a proposal that did become law (1844. IV. t.c.). It allowed for non-nobles to acquire lands belonging to nobles and to occupy any office that had

48 Ibid., 379–80; Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 61–2; April 4, 1843, Deák to Kossuth, *Deák Ferenc emlékezete*, 95.

previously been a monopoly of nobles. However, until the *aviticitas* was abolished, and it was not, most noble-held property remained beyond reach for non-nobles.⁴⁹ Nor was the right of a non-noble to become employed in an office an easy matter, when nobles possessed all the necessary networks and connections.

Delegates, mostly but not exclusively the liberals, were obsessed with the question of the Hungarian language and, beyond this, with their country's isolation and the threats that they imagined were coming from Russia and the Slavs. Outbursts were prompted by the Croatian delegates who ostentatiously insisted on speaking in Latin. "We are under hostile siege not only by the government and foreign countries," said Ödön Beöthy, "but by everything that exists in this world." Mór Perczel, another liberal, declared that "Germans and Slavs bore into the country's heart, wishing to destroy it." Some conservatives reflected a similar anxiety. "If splendid mansions, steamboats, and railways will not be Magyar, [they] will be nothing but tombstones over our deceased nation's coffin," stated Pál Somssich. Among the few delegates who rationally discussed this issue was the conservative Ede Zsedényi, who warned that it was precisely the imposition of the Hungarian language on non-Magyars that would force Hungarians to confront interference from Russia. In another speech, Zsedényi pointed out that Catholic Croats, like the Poles, would be impervious to Russian imperialistic intentions.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding these rational voices, fears and anxieties mixed with pride and overweening ambition were channeled into the law (1844. II. t.c.) making Hungarian the official language of the kingdom. This law reflected, to a large extent, the evolution that the Hungarian language had made, but it was still considered by Hungarian nationalists as a significant milestone. Vienna was not pleased. Karl Friedrich von Kübeck, whom Robert Kann characterized as "one of the ablest bureaucrats under three emperors," described Latin as "the foundation for education and the [sole] historical medium in both the old and new civilizations." He disparaged the use of national languages, primarily by the Magyars but also by the Slavs, as signs of "barbarism and

49 Pajkossy, "A reformkor (1830–1848)," 231.

50 June 21, 1843, Kovács, *Az 1843/44-ik magyar országgyűlési napló*, 1: 414–5; July 5, 1843, *ibid.*, 1: 537; November 18, 1843, *ibid.*, 3: 126; June 3, 1843, *ibid.*, 1: 258–9; November 20, 1843, *ibid.*, 145.

power." In his opinion, the Magyars "were so backward that they would be unable to use their language as the proper means of civilization."⁵¹

This act of making Hungarian the country's official language nevertheless symbolized the successful fusion of cultural and political nationalisms. The German case was different from the Hungarian, because German nationalism was more diffuse and philosophical than nationalism in Hungary, deeply rooted in concrete historical memories. Yet Herder's dictum that "linguistic consciousness was the basis for national unity" did hold true for Hungary as well. Even Széchenyi would have agreed to that. Yet another aspect of nationalism, which derived from its dynamism, propelled it forward eventually to reach the objective of national independence. "A nation," wrote Max Weber, "is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own." Italy was politically fragmented, but Giuseppe Mazzini was already conspiring to establish a unified Italian state. The situation of Hungary was somewhat anomalous. Although it was a state, it lacked most prerogatives of full independence. Even the most rabid Hungarian nationalists recognized the advantages of being protected by the military might of a large empire, but to liberals the dynamics of nationalism implied that fighting strongly for an ever greater share of autonomy was an imperative and inevitable necessity.⁵²

Metternich, a statesman whose essential ideas had been formed in the late eighteenth century, was dead set against the momentum that the *Zeitgeist*, as shaped by both liberalism and nationalism, represented. For him, major and substantial reforms signified steps that would inexorably lead to anarchy. Expressing his fear in a memorandum at the end of 1844, he thought that a revolution was about to break out in Hungary. Yet, he was also a cunning tactician who had made concessions to the 1843–44 diet on various reform proposals, primarily to delay or optimally to prevent such a revolution from taking place. To a degree, he also acted in the spirit of moderate reform, because, ever since Maria Theresa, the Habsburgs had not wanted to allow Hungary to sink below a level that would have kept the country lopsidedly back-

51 Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 283; December 1, 1843, *Iratok*, 554.

52 Bernhard Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation: Collective identity in a German Axial Age* (Cambridge, 1998; originally published in German in 1993), 94; quoted in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), 25.

ward, as compared with the monarchy's more prosperous parts. It was a balancing act, certainly by the nineteenth century, which involved the idea of saving what could be saved of the old system and reforming only when no other alternatives remained or when the paramount interests of the Monarchy did demand some alterations. In this respect, Metternich's knowledge of Hungary was superficial, mirroring the customary Austrian attitude best described as "a general reluctance to see any Hungarian point of view."⁵³

The liberals were angry about the indifference which, they believed, Vienna had manifested about the Slav danger confronting Hungarians. This anger was often couched in statements that, in retrospect, appear quite off the mark. "The Empire is falling apart," said Mór Perczel, "and [only] we Hungarians can stem the tide and put an end to the disintegration." Móricz Szentkirályi asserted that Hungary was "the Monarchy's center of gravity," a frequently repeated claim. Szentkirályi assumed that the main reason for Austria's hostility towards Hungary was that the latter had a constitution. "Are we or are we not a conquered province of Austria?" he asked rhetorically. "We gave Austria power and glory and (what did we get back in return)?" Silence proved to Szentkirályi that the answer to his question was nothing or not much.⁵⁴

The diet was dissolved in 1844, amidst a general sense of failure shared by the two antagonists, Széchenyi and Kossuth. "Never did the Magyars commit greater sins when victory was in our hands" was Széchenyi's comment. "My poor orphaned country," Kossuth exclaimed, "I am disillusioned in your future." Liberals, feeling already at a loss because of Deák's absence at the diet, became dispirited, especially because the government decided to remove Kossuth as editor-in-chief of *Pesti Hírlap*. Furthermore, the government also decided to return

53 R.J.W. Evans, "Liberalism, nationalism, and the coming of the revolution" in R.J.W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (eds.), *The Revolutions in Europe: From Reform to Reaction* (Oxford, 2000), 12–3; *Memoirs de Metternich*, "Sûr la Situation en Hongrie" (end of 1844), 7: 52; Julius von Miskolczy, "Metternich und die ungarischen Stände," *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 12 (1959), 247; Erzsébet Andics, "Metternich and the emerging 'neo-conservative' tendency in Hungary," *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestiensis. Sectio historica* 13 (1972), 95; Evans, "The Habsburgs and the Hungarian problem," 190.

54 November 16, 1843, Kovács, *Az 1843/1844-ik országgyűlési napló*, 3: 69; September 14, 1843, *ibid.*, 2: 442; November 16, 1843, *ibid.*, 3: 79.

to hard-line policies and to dismiss liberal or indifferent lord lieutenants with loyal administrators. Count György Apponyi, a follower of Aurél Dessewffy but without his stature and talents, was appointed Chancellor.⁵⁵

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS:
KOSSUTH'S *VÉDEGYLET*

For some time, exhortations urging improvements had been bombarding those in Hungary who were in charge of the economy. Széchenyi played a paramount role in this, but others before him and with him at the same time also performed important roles. The Hungarian propensity to examine how far the west excelled in comparison to Hungarian economic development, or, more painfully, how far Hungary had fallen behind was gaining momentum. Economic developments in England were so far ahead of Hungary's that they might as well happened on another planet,⁵⁶ but industrialization in neighboring Austria was another matter. Especially in the German areas of Bohemia and Moravia and parts of Styria and Upper Austria, the speed and extent of industrialization were spectacular. "In 1841," Robin Okey wrote, "those with modern equipment were already producing three times as much as those without and craftshops combined." At the same time, this process brought about adverse consequences, including bureaucratic impediments, lack of credit, and poverty and insecurity among the workers, who were threatened with occasional unemployment that further increased poverty.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, from the vantage point of backward, agrarian Hungary, the prospective advantages of encouraging commerce and industry dwarfed any possible handicaps. According to Mihály Horváth, part of the reason these issues had been ignored in Hungary was their prosaic and unspectacular character, but this, Horváth happily reported, was changing. "In our era," Horváth wrote, "the material part of life

55 Quoted in Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 325; Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*, 348.

56 "In England, as early as 1841, agriculture was already contributing as little as 22% to the GNP, industry 34% and the service sector (including transport and communication 44%." Iván Berend and György Ránki, *The European Periphery and Industrialization, 1780–1914* (Cambridge, 1982), 17.

57 Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 81, 86–7.

attracts excellent attention, for it enhances the people's happiness." János Joó claimed that a nation's cultural and technical developments were so closely intertwined that one could not be imagined without the other. János Fogarasi, advocating a national bank, asked his readers, "May I ask my compatriots, is there another country that could better use such an institution?"⁵⁸

Exhortations in themselves were, of course, insufficient, because material and psychological conditions had to be sufficiently developed for Hungary to move ahead, and they developed only gradually and incompletely. The country was still mired in a deeply-rooted feudal system. In spite of sporadic improvements, the landowners' attachment to the old ways of doing things remained strong. True, both landowners and peasants, if they were in the position to do it, tried to get rich, but at the expense of others, rather than through hard work and innovations. The development of commerce was still hampered by an obsolete transport system, and the number of factories was relatively few. As Széchenyi had already pointed out, all problems should not be blamed on Austria and the internal tariffs within the Monarchy. Flaws existing within Hungarian society itself had also been playing a role. Old habits died hard, and even noblemen who called themselves liberals were often torn between the old and the new. István Deák's term for them as "progressive feudalists" perfectly mirrors their split frame of mind.⁵⁹

The preference for the old usually dominated conservative thinking, and this was the world that Kossuth confronted. According to conventional wisdom, Széchenyi gave priority to economic and Kossuth to political issues. This simplifies what actually happened. Indeed, after his release from prison, Kossuth concentrated on politics and on editing *Pesti Hírlap*, but issues of economic development were never far from his mind. In jail he read the works of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. As a convinced free-trader, Kossuth became an early advocate of in-

58 Horváth, *Az ipar és kereskedelem története Magyarországon IV–V*, 11; János Joó, *Nézetek a magyar nemzeti műveltség és technika kifejlésztése tárgyában* [Opinions about the expansion of Hungarian national culture and technology] (Buda, 1841), 13. János Fogarasi, *Magyar bank* [Hungarian bank] (Pest, 1841), 3.

59 Ferenc Eckhart, *A magyar közgazdaság száz éve 1841–1941* [Hundred years of the Hungarian economy] (Budapest, 1941), 8, 10–5; István Deák, "Progressive feudalists: The Hungarian nobility in 1848" in Ivo Banac and Paul Bushkovitch (eds.), *The Nobility in Russia and Eastern Europe* (New Haven, 1983), 123.

dustrial development. "I was convinced [already in prison]" Kossuth later reminisced, "that a nation engaged only in agriculture is like a man with only one arm."⁶⁰

In the politics of the immediate past, oriented toward airing grievances, even the conservative cultural nationalists and their allies in the counties stood on mercantilist grounds. They hoped that industrial development would come about once the Monarchy's internal tariffs were dissolved and tariffs along the Monarchy's frontiers strengthened. The government, equally mercantilist (cameralist), wished to maintain the *status quo*. This situation changed when Kübeck converted to the idea of free trade. Supported by Metternich, Kübeck was prepared for the Monarchy to join the Zollverein, the customs union of several German states. However, they were voted down in the State Council in 1841. Austrian industrialists feared competition, and Austrian agricultural producers wanted to maintain their protection *vis-à-vis* Hungary.⁶¹

Conservatives in Hungary were split on this issue. Some, like Count Emil Desseffy, Aurél's brother, enthusiastically endorsed joining the Zollverein, while others, including Count Albert Sztáray, remained skeptical. He believed that conditions in England were so dismal that establishing large factories in Hungary should be postponed until the latest possible date.⁶²

Hungary's liberals, with Kossuth at their helm, took a strong stand against joining the Zollverein. Whether this reflected a change of heart on Kossuth's part from a free-trader to a protectionist, from a disciple of Adam Smith to that of Friedrich List, is a matter of dispute.⁶³ More importantly, perhaps, Kossuth used this debate to further the expansion of Hungarian sovereignty, defending Hungarian particularism

60 Quoted in Zoltán Varga, "A Védegyletről" [About the Védegylet], *Debreceni Szemle* 9, no. 91 (1935), 294.

61 Julius von Miskolczy, "Gesamtstaatsidee und Wirtschaftspolitik in Ungarn 1790–1848," *A gróf Klebelsberg Kunó Magyar Történetkutató Intézet Évkönyve* 6 (1936), 168, 192, 198–9; Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790–1918*, 261.

62 Kautz, *Nemzetgazdasági eszmék*, 422; *Világ*, April 2, 1842.

63 To a majority of authors, the answer to this question was positive: Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 52; Kautz, *Nemzetgazdasági eszmék*, 351; Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, 239. János Veliky represents the contrary opinion: János Veliky, "Az ipartámogató Kossuth" [Kossuth, supporting industry], *Századok* 128, no. 5 (1994), 819, 825–7.

against the idea and practices of the Gesamtmonarchie, the Monarchy as a whole.

Whatever the underlying motive, the logical consequence of this development was the establishment of the *Védegylet*, a protectionist association, in October, 1844, with Kossuth as its first director. The association obliged its members to wear or use only products that were manufactured in Hungary. István Deák labeled this endeavor both “grandiose and impractical,” because “it soon became clear that the infant Hungarian economy could not possibly grow without western (especially Austrian) assistance.” A charge can again be made, and István Deák has made it in another context, that “more than anyone else, Kossuth fostered the crisis.”⁶⁴

Certainly, Kossuth was an outstanding and charismatic politician. A combination of his liberal utopianism, determination, and relentless drive led him to costly blunders on occasion. But was the *Védegylet* truly a costly blunder? It fell short of its ambitious objectives, but it did result in the creation of about a hundred new factories of various sizes between 1844 and 1845. When Baron Zsigmond Kemény, no friend of Kossuth, visited the industrial exhibition in 1846, he was pleasantly surprised about the progress that Hungary had made in its manufacturing capabilities. As István Deák has pointed out, “Kossuth succeeded where the far more erudite and pragmatic Széchenyi failed: Kossuth made the industrial revolution a popular subject.” Ferenc Deák, no natural enthusiast, endorsed the concept, though attaching to it some practical reservations, in a letter to Kossuth. A fellow liberal, Menyhért Lónyay, offered the best contemporary analysis. “We have to look,” Lónyay wrote, “not to how much domestic materials people use or how many small factories have been established, but to how people, both members of the *Védegylet* and those who are not, begin to get acquainted with their country’s economic circumstances and start to think accordingly.”⁶⁵

The dismantling of feudalism and a reversal of institutional social and economic backwardness remained a monumental and urgent task

64 Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 48, 53, 62.

65 Pajkossy, “A magyar reformkor,” 235; Samu Benkő (ed.), *Kemény Zsigmond naplója* [The diary of Zsigmond Kemény] (Budapest, 1974), 147–8; István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 48; November 2, 1844, Deák’s letter to Kossuth, *Deák Ferenc emlékezete*, 128–9; Menyhért Lónyay, *Hazánk anyagi érdekeiről* [About the material interests of our country] (Pest, 1847), 3–4.

for all liberals. They did not trust the government in this struggle, with good reason. They thought that the government capriciously and unpredictably changed courses. It could appear to favor reforms and concessions one year and turn against them the next. Count Lajos Batthyány, leader of the small group of liberal aristocrats, was blatant in his criticism in a speech that he made in the Upper Chamber on November 10, 1844. "I have never had any trust in the government ... and I have never doubted that the Austrian system has always been ungrateful."⁶⁶

It is possible to argue that the Monarchy, as an economic unit based on the idea of free trade, would have led to genuine viability in the 1840s, but this anachronistic view ignores the combination of liberalism and nationalism, which had by then become potent forces. They posed, most openly and militantly in Hungary, a fundamental challenge to the Monarchy's paternalistic social and political system. Kossuth had not caused this to happen; at best, or worst, depending on one's point of view, he was a facilitator of this momentum, although, admittedly, he pushed harder and more successfully to reach his objectives than any other, less able Hungarian liberal leader did.

Although feudalism was not abolished until 1848 and customs and habits of feudalism did survive far beyond 1848, Hungary did experience considerable changes in the 1840s. Following Joseph II's educational policies and the Ratio Educationis, which expanded the number of educated people, and the economic boom of the Napoleonic wars, a gradual growth of industry ran parallel with the growth of towns. The old guilds kept declining; a number of guild members got stuck in their increasingly obsolete ways of manufacturing and marketing their products, but others recognized that they could become wealthy only if they went outside the guild system. A few factories, primarily paper mills, flour mills, sugar refineries, leather and textile factories, were established. The number of factory workers grew, more than doubling to 150,000 in 1848, according to Pajkossy's estimation. Transport improved, thanks in large measure to Széchenyi's efforts. Thirty-two steamships were sailing on the Hungarian section of the Danube, and the first railway, Pest and Vác, was built in 1846.⁶⁷

66 Quoted in Gábor Erdődy, *Batthyány Lajos* (Budapest, 1998), 21.

67 Gyula Mérei, "A magyar céhrendszer 1848 előtt" [The system of guilds before 1848], *Századok* 82, nos. 1–4 (1948), 67–8; Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 50–1; January 4, 2011, Gábor Pajkossy's letter to the author.

Financing for this economic activity came mostly from the Rothschild and Sima banking houses in Austria, and, after the 1840 reform of the credit law, from domestic sources as well. Thirty-five savings banks were operating in Hungary by 1848, and their deposits grew from only 670,000 pengő forints in 1843–44 to five million by 1848. Participants in this new kind of economic activity were mostly Jews. Divided between liberals, who wished to enter the modern world as Hungarians, and orthodox, who tried to preserve both their rituals and their isolation from the rest of society, Jews were not yet fully emancipated. Among the best-known families from the first group, the Chorins, the Wodianers, and the Ullmanns converted to Christianity. Their centers of activities were in the towns, but Jews, mainly as tavern-keepers and grain merchants, were also ubiquitous in the countryside. By 1848, approximately 250,000 Jews were living in Hungary, accounting for about 2% of the total population.⁶⁸

While German burghers in towns were inclined to perceive Jews as competitors and fought against them, Hungarian liberal public opinion was, by and large, welcoming to them. Adolf Frankenburg praised a certain Fülöp Hirschfeld, who had published a Jewish catechism in Hungarian. In Frankenburg's opinion, this not only served the noble cause of "becoming Magyar," but also aided in the elimination of damaging prejudices.⁶⁹

Another example of change was the steady growth of a new kind of urban population, primarily young men from the provinces, some noble but mostly not, who were employed in poorly paid jobs with scant chances for advancement. Their new urban environment essentially liberated them from feudal ties. As a matter of fact, they were bitterly opposed in principle to those ties. Experiencing contempt and exclusion from the German burghers who were still running most of the towns, these young provincials were fervent Hungarian nationalists. Under the guidance of their intellectual leaders, they succeeded in creating a new subculture, characterized by a socially egalitarian and politically democratic orientation, which they identified as French and

68 Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 51; Aladár Komlós, *Magyar–zsidó szellemtörténet a reformkortól a holocaustig* [Hungarian–Jewish history of ideas from the Age of Reform through the Holocaust], 2 volumes (Budapest, 1997), 1: 50.

69 *Pesti Hírlap*, May 19, 1842.

revolutionary. This new subculture was now added to the rich panorama of subcultures already existing in Hungary. The best-known representative of this group was Sándor Petőfi, the poet.⁷⁰

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL PLURALISM

Apart from the occasional gesture of kindness to a political adversary—the liberal Imre Vahot characterized the conservative Ede Zsedényi as a sympathetic figure—polarization between the two camps had deepened by the late 1840s. The tone of debates was becoming sharper and often rude. Even earlier, in 1842, Frankenburg had already remarked that “we are politicking in an awful manner.” Kossuth himself, after he was forced out as editor of *Pesti Hírlap*, grew more radical and strident, although he was not yet a revolutionary or a democrat.⁷¹

Along with Kossuth, liberals and conservatives alike had become more radical. This had already been true to some extent during the 1843–44 diet, when mutual hostility seeped even into the social life of the delegates. Their wives often followed the proceedings from the galleries, and women from one camp refused to socialize with women from the other. A typical sample from the *Nemzeti Újság*, which was becoming the most ardent conservative organ by the second half of the 1840s, suggested that liberals were trying to cure the ills of Hungary with poison, instead of medicine.⁷²

The use of administrators by the government, although it provoked resistance in the counties, particularly bloody in Bihar County, was not altogether unsuccessful. The moderately conservative message, an amalgam of progressive rhetoric and conservative policies, had a long-standing resonance with a large segment of the nobility. The tactic of the Monarchy’s government, in conjunction with Hungarian allies, of

70 Károly Vörös, “Petőfi és a pesti kispolgár” [Petőfi and the petty bourgeoisie from Pest] in Sándor Lukácsy and János Varga (eds.), *Petőfi és kora* [Petőfi and his era] (Budapest, 1970), 11–46.

71 Imre Vahot, *Országgyűlési almanach* [Parliamentary almanac] (Pest, 1843), 1: 37–8; *Pesti Hírlap*, January 20, 1842; Gábor Pajkossy, “Lajos Kossuth” in András Gerő (ed.), *Hungarian Liberals* (Budapest, 1999), 133, 128.

72 Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történetéből*, 2: 390; *Nemzeti Újság*, January 3, 1844.

containing the liberals worked to a degree and succeeded in luring some liberal moderates into the government's own camp.⁷³

Sándor Liphay, after becoming the editor of *Nemzeti Újság*, starting in January 1845, imprinted a markedly self-conscious, outspokenly conservative profile upon the paper. He formulated the conservative agenda in moral terms. "We should become radical in eliminating what is bad," he wrote, "and may our God help us to preserve what is good." Liphay also stressed the need for legitimacy and for strict laws and defended the idea and practices of a strong government in order to be both "aristocratic and progressive, based on stability."⁷⁴

This tendency was so strong that not even the traditional Hungarian aversion to Austria deterred many noblemen from supporting Hungarian conservatives, closely allied with Vienna, in the government. Emil Dessewffy told Zsigmond Kemény on August 6, 1846 that conservatives were united, because only in alliance with the government could the country's happiness be secured.⁷⁵ Indeed, on November 12, 1846, a Conservative Party was officially established. The party's objectives were the modernization of the economy and public life, the defense of the "throne, the altar, and the constitution," and the restoration of order. The actual proposed reforms, including founding a model prison, regulating tariffs, increasing the influence of the towns, and establishing a national bank, were relatively modest. The Conservative Party rejected obligatory manumission for the serfs, wanted only to modify the *aviticitas*, and kept silent about the nobles' tax exemption. A young French traveler, August de Gerando, thought that this party should not even exist. "What do you want to conserve in a country where everything still needs to be created?" he asked.⁷⁶

The liberals responded to this new challenge by founding in January, 1847 a so-called Oppositional Circle under the leadership of Count László Teleki, a liberal aristocrat, functioning parallel with the group under Lajos Batthyány's chairmanship. An oppositional declaration

73 Kosáry, 301.

74 *Nemzeti Újság*, January 2 and 5, 1845.

75 Benkő, *Kemény Zsigmond naplója*, 129.

76 Dénes, "A magyar konzervatívok társadalomszemlélete," 463; Iván Zoltán Dénes, *Az önrendelkezés érvényessége* [The validity of self-government] (Budapest, 1988), 96–7; Pajkossy, "A reformkor (1830–1848)," 240; quoted in Péter Rubin, *Francia barátunk, Auguste de Gerando (1819–1849)* [Our French friend, Auguste de Gerando] (Budapest, 1982), 92.

was accepted by a liberal conference in June, 1847. The writer András Fáy summarized the liberal position in a pamphlet edited by József Bajza. In a relatively moderate but decisive tone, Fáy stated that the opposition would object to any absolutist move on the government's part and to any breach of laws, although it would support the government against anarchy or any disturbance. On the positive side, the opposition would reject any piecemeal modifications of reforms in favor of peacefully but forcefully promoting progress. The goal of the opposition was the attainment of liberty and rights, not just for a small minority, but for the good of all. In addition to this primary goal, the oppositional declaration advocated the pursuit of other ideas, such as demands for transparency by the government, obligatory manumission of serfs, dissolution of *aviticitas*, payment of taxes by all, rights of association, and freedom of the press. Deák was said to have moderated some of these demands in order to make them more palatable to a wider public. However, he also apparently introduced the potentially explosive idea of how much easier any negotiation between Austria and Hungary would be if the former would also become a constitutional country.⁷⁷

Fáy, in his essay, warned the opposition that it would be both unnecessary and damaging to break into factions. Thanks mostly to Deák, the differences between radicals and moderates in the liberal camp could somehow be papered over, but one major gulf could not be bridged. The intellectual elite of the liberals, including Baron József Eötvös, László Szalay, Antal Csengery, and Ágoston Trefort, were impatient with the inefficiencies and inherent unfairness of the system in Hungarian counties. Whatever merits they may have had in the past, the very cumbersome ways of legislating at the diets, connected to elections in the counties, led to political paralysis. Eötvös described the situation as fifty-two separate legislatures, each pulling in different directions without giving any opportunity for the unfolding of the national interest. The centralists, as this group became known, proposed adopting the western, more precisely, a French model, a constitutional syst-

77 András Fáy, "Az ellenzék, különösen a magyar" [The opposition, especially the Magyar] in József Bajza (ed.), *Ellenőr. Politikai zsebkönyv a pesti ellenzéki kör megbízásából* [The controller: A political pamphlet commissioned by the oppositional circle of Pest] (in Germany, 1847), 3, 4, 6, 10; Pajkossy, "A reformkor (1830–1848), 241; Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 71.

em based on a representative government with a central legislature. Logic was on the side of the centralists, but public sentiment was not. Kossuth was not the only one who romanticized the counties. Ferenc Pulszky, who wrote several articles in *Pesti Hírlap* combating the centralists, claimed that centralization would, among other negative trends, endanger liberty, promote uniformity, and lead to the preponderance of the capital city, which would, in turn, monopolize the best minds of the country. As late as 1868, the liberal economist, Gyula Kautz, was calling Hungarian counties “the country’s parliaments” which had become significant institutions in the nation’s public life. Many in the reading public of the 1840s would have enthusiastically agreed with this description. After Kossuth’s removal as editor of *Pesti Hírlap*, the centralists took over the paper and published a great many learned articles. The number of subscribers precipitously dropped.⁷⁸

The sense of urgency about ushering in reforms, irrespective of individual temperament, was axiomatic for liberals. The sober and calm Ferenc Deák favored a speedy enactment of reforms just as much as Kossuth, a high-strung man who was easily angered. In 1846, the rumor that the government was inciting peasants in Galicia against a recalcitrant nobility caused a great stir. Although the content of this rumor turned out to be false, Hungarian liberals had already concluded from their inaccurate perception that this eventuality in Hungary must be pre-empted by the nobles’ voluntarily jettisoning their privileges. Kossuth, impelled by a sense of urgency, wished to transform the previously applied gradualist method into a “frontal assault against absolutism,” to the point of demanding a role for Hungary even in the Monarchy’s foreign policy, which had always been a jealously guarded privilege of the government in Vienna. The logical result of this assault pointed toward a mere personal union, that is, the emperor of Austria and king of Hungary, the same person wearing two different crowns, ruling over two essentially independent countries, linked together only by the person of the sovereign. Kossuth hoped to achieve his aims

78 Fáy, “Az ellenzék, különösen ha magyar,” 15; Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történetéből*, 2: 466; *Pesti Hírlap*, February 17, 1842; Kautz, *Nemzetgazdasági eszmék*, 341; Pajkossy, “A reformkor (1830–1848),” 236. See also István Schlett, *Eötvös József* (Budapest, 1987); István Fenyő, *A centralisták. Egy liberális csoport a reformkorban* [The centralists: A liberal group in the Age of Reform] (Budapest, 1997).

peacefully; he was still not a revolutionary, but he did not rule out a revolution as a solution, if all else would fail.⁷⁹

Széchenyi, becoming desperate, was more fearful of Kossuth than ever before, and he launched another book against the liberals in general and Kossuth in particular in 1847. Since 1845, Széchenyi had been serving in the government as head of the department of transport. Although he did not officially join the conservatives, he became one of them, certainly in the eyes of his adversaries. His book, entitled *Politikai programtöredékek* (Political fragments) contained perhaps his most intemperate writing, filled with passion and self-righteous anger. He called the liberal opposition “impatient” and “irascible,” leading Hungarians down the path to ruin. He argued that it had made sense to be oppositional as long as the government was impervious to just national demands. However, once the government had changed its ways and became respectful of the country’s nationality and constitution, Széchenyi held to hate that government amounted to slandering it. He claimed that all the accumulated hatred, violence, and terrorism was the opposition’s fault. Széchenyi characterized Kossuth as “a demagogue,” “a conceited self-appointed prophet,” “a false political messiah,” and “a lawyer with a shady reputation,” and blamed Kossuth for all adverse developments. A key to Széchenyi’s thinking, very much in line with his basic philosophy of politics, appeared in a paragraph in which he compared “the clever sailor,” “the wise general,” and “the sober politician,” all of whom were, through the force of their personalities and wisdom, able to guide the destinies, respectively, of their ship, their army, and their nation.”⁸⁰ These metaphors, however, were too abstract and too disconnected from current Hungarian realities to make a positive impression on Kossuth and his liberal followers.

All the subcultures that had flourished in Hungary continued to co-exist, even reinforcing each other at times and engaging in apparent conflicts with one another without any resolution at other times. The longstanding sense of permanence was always implicitly, rather than explicitly, stated. In the 1830’s and 1840s, the writings of the archconservatives, such as Ponorí-Thewrewk or Éliássy, illustrate its continuing

79 András Gergely, “A radikális reform stratégiája” [The strategy of radical reform], *Világosság* 27, no. 10 (1986), 630–2.

80 István Széchenyi, “Politikai programtöredékek” [Political fragments] in Szekfű, *A mai Széchenyi*, 360–1, 364–5, 367, 374, 380, 390.

existence, as these authors raged over experiencing what they had regarded as an assault by the modern world. Rather than a display of self-confidence in a future that could be seamlessly connected to the past and present, the yearning for a sense of permanence generated a desperate cry for help. The moderate conservatives were somewhat less panicky, because of their quite successful manipulation of progressive rhetoric, but their emphasis on continuity and stability was an attempt at restoring a modified version of the very same.

The sense of permanence was under siege, but its protagonists could find at least some comfort in the fact that other sub-cultures were making efforts at propping it up through their own supportive networks and rhetoric. R.J.W. Evans has called attention to how liberal thought made inroads into European Catholic Churches in the 1840s. This was also true in Hungary where liberals like Mihály Horváth were becoming active among the clergy. Jácint Rónay, a Benedictine monk, reminisced later in life about the patriotic liberal spirit that had pervaded his monastery at Pannonhalma. At the 1843–44 diet, Canon Károly Vurda made a passionate speech in favor of religious freedom. Quickly silenced by other canons, as well as bishops, attending the diet, he was then replaced by what they considered a reliable clergyman.

For all the exceptions, the Church itself, as an institution, remained staunchly conservative. It insisted on blocking efforts that aimed to whittle down ecclesiastical privileges by making the Protestant churches equal with the Catholic one. Going beyond this, Catholic conservatives realized that simply defending Catholic dogmas was not enough and that they also had to fight against secularism and liberalism, concepts they viewed as synonymous, in the country's political and social life. Political Catholicism, following the lead of the Vatican, attempted to mobilize "the entire Catholic public sphere" as it "renounced (liberal) middle-class culture." *Nemzeti Újság* was its principal organ, and schools and devotional societies were enlisted in the cause as well. Some ambivalence about securing Church support existed; the fact that the Church was on the defensive militated against a close alliance. In this sense, Hungary was a somewhat muted version of the general situation in Europe. "As the great cities mushroomed," wrote T.C.W. Blanning, "communications expanded ... the churches could not run fast enough even to stay in the same place. Their impressive capacity for political organization and popular mobilization could not disguise their relative move towards the margins." Nevertheless, in 1847, roughly

one quarter of the membership in the *Gyűlde*, the Conservative Club in Pest, consisted of Catholic priests.⁸¹

So, too, numerous liberals could be found among the Protestants, although the Protestant churches themselves were also conservative. The Lutherans, more inward-looking, followed their pietist tradition. At the same time, they were preoccupied with their ultimately unsuccessful effort to reach a fusion with the Calvinists, although they did also fight for full equality with the Catholics. The conservatism of the Calvinist Church was largely rooted in gratitude for its partial emancipation by Joseph II. This, along with dreading a possible reversal of previous progress and desiring to reach a final settlement between the churches, made official Calvinist conservatism explicable. Its typical representative was the Calvinist bishop of Debrecen, István Szoboszlai Pap who, at every opportunity, expressed utmost loyalty to the government and tried to neutralize or at least moderate liberal demands. Giving a sermon in 1831, he asserted that "should the enemy attack, all of us would rally to defend our country and our sovereign." For him, as for most Calvinist preachers, kings were tools of divine providence. While adamant in protecting the rights of his denomination, the general approach of Bishop Pap to problems of his era was to avoid creating any waves, an approach which tacitly endorsed the necessity of perpetuating the sense of permanence.⁸²

The antiquated system of education was another conservative force in Hungarian society. For all the efforts of liberal reformers to modernize the system, tradition and inertia prevailed. Secondary schools in the 1830s and 1840s were still teaching obsolete subjects and emphasizing Latin grammar and rhetoric at the expense of mathematics and the natural sciences. The lack of good textbooks, as well as badly educated

81 Evans, "Liberalism, nationalism, and the coming of the revolution," 16; Lajos Pál, *Rónay Jácint* (Budapest, 1976), 340; Horváth, *Huszonöt év Magyarország történetéből*, 2: 399–403; Csaba Fazekas, "The dawn of political Catholicism in Hungary, 1844–1848," *Hungarian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1998–99), 15, 17, 19, 21–3; T.C.W. Blanning, "Introduction," in T.C.W. Blanning (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century Europe 1789–1914* (Oxford, 2000), 5.

82 István Szoboszlai Pap, *Keresztény alattvalói elmélkedés* [Reflection over Christian loyalty by subjects] (Debrecen, 1831), 12; Zoltán Varga, "Kálvinista konzervatizmus," *Protestáns Szemle* 42, no. 5 (1933), 220–2; Zoltán Varga, *A reformkori Debrecen konzervatívizmusának gyökerei* [The roots of conservatism in the Age of Reform of Debrecen] (Debrecen, 1976), 14, 19, 20, 21.

and/or lazy teachers, accounted for the procedures of dictating lectures and requiring the pupils to memorize and learn by rote. This same kind of obsolescence, with a few exceptions—the eccentric but influential István Horvát, who was appointed professor of Hungarian language and literature in 1830 was one—also characterized higher education. The dominance of legal studies and lack of training in the technical and natural scientific fields were constant sore points for at least some of the delegates at the diets, but the old system remained basically unchanged.⁸³

However, even Kossuth recognized that classical education had some merits. Although he was an ardent champion of the Magyar language, he did not wish to do away with what he regarded as valuable contributions of the classics. Multiple impacts of this tradition were noticeable in the frequent moralizing commentaries, used mostly but not exclusively by the conservatives. After all, advocating for harmony, balance, and poise and also praising “virtue” were useful psychological goals in a turbulent transitional age. Ignác Zsoldos, a judge, published a book on popular etiquette in 1840, in which he stressed obedience to one’s betters as the ultimate virtue. In *Pesti Hírlap*, an author promoted a public singing school, because such a school, apart from its main mission, would also “tame morality.” In another article in the same paper, János Balogh endorsed “personal reconciliation and friendship without abandoning our principles.” A correspondent of *Világ* from the town of Lőcse (Levoča/Leutschau) expressed similar thoughts by condemning “partisanship and passionate vehemence” in favor of “patience, concern for each other, and a sense of fairness.” Even in the militant *Nemzeti Újság*, an author pleaded for some “English phlegm” in order to cut down on impetuosity and the number of duels in Hungary. Harmony was also important for János Hetényi, a committed liberal who believed that innovations and reforms would benefit not only their promoters, but also those who initially had expressed fear and misgivings about them.⁸⁴

83 Lajos Orosz, “Középiszkolák és felsőoktatási intézmények” [Secondary and higher education] in Horváth, *A magyar nevelés története*, 1: 300, 307, 312; *MM*, 5: 339.

84 Kornis, *A magyar művelődés eszményei 1777–1848*, 2: 354–8; Ignác Zsoldos, *Népszerű erkölcstudomány* [Popular etiquette] (Buda, 1840), 41, 46, 48; *Pesti Hírlap*, April 17, 21, 1842; *Világ*, February 19, 1842; *Nemzeti Újság*, January 13, 1844; János Hetényi, *Robot és dézsma* [Forced labor and tithe] (Pest, 1845), 140.

These voices, cries in the wilderness, were generally not heeded, because polarization and mutual hostility between the two camps were deepening by the mid-late 1840s. Politics, with all of its venom, penetrated the world of culture as well, which was viewed not in an isolated compartment, but as an integral part of the national existence. For example, whether the National Theater performed plays with moral and nationalistic messages or flooded the stage with non-political light entertainment was perceived as a matter of great significance in the world of the Hungarian theater. Liberals favored the former, and conservatives wanted the latter. The debate on this issue between the liberal József Bajza and the conservative János Munkácsy was vitriolic, each of them labeling the other a liar. Well-publicized literary controversies, including law suits and passionate letters, frequently took place. Not even the august Academy of Sciences was immune to extreme bickering. An anonymous author in *Pesti Hírlap*, who, Pajkossy strongly believes, was Ferenc Pulszky, attended a public meeting of the Academy and was so appalled by the mud-slinging and violent rhetoric that he left the meeting with a heavy and sad heart.⁸⁵

Nor did lawsuits with devastating results abate. Jácint Rónay illustrated this point by using his own family's history. "The law suit that made the lives of my relatives hell, which put my grandparents and parents into their graves and compelled me to enter a monastery," he wrote, "ended in 1844 ... everything was sold by auction, and only the worthless furniture in a small room was left for my brother."⁸⁶

While the Biedermeyer was blunting the rough edges of family lives, the Baroque erupted from time to time. An article in *Pesti Hírlap* spoke of politics as theater. August de Gerando, shortly after his arrival in Hungary, was invited to one celebration after the other, all marked by ostentatious displays of baroque exuberance. This tradition was not a monopoly of the nobles, because peasants also engaged in it; we know this from the memoir of a peasant bricklayer, who went back to

85 Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet*, 260–1; István Fenyő, *Valóságábrázolás és eszményítés 1830–1842* [The depiction of reality and idealization 1830–1842] (Budapest, 1990), 62–130, 270–351; Anna Szalai (ed.), *Tollharcok. Irodalmi és színházi viták, 1830–1847* [Polemics: Literary and theater disputes 1830–1847] (Budapest, 1981), 349–74; *Pesti Hírlap*, December 1, 1842; January 4, 2011, letter of Gábor Pajkossy to the author.

86 György Hölvényi (ed.), *Rónay Jácint: Napló (válogatás)* [The diary of Jácint Rónay: A selection] (Budapest–Pannonhalma, 1996), 32.

his village to enjoy a lavish golden anniversary celebration of his parents. Young artisans in towns followed similar patterns, spending their hard-earned money on a rich feast every year.⁸⁷

It is not true, therefore, that, in the mid-late 1840s, “the idea of civil society replaced the heroic baroque concept.”⁸⁸ It did not. Nevertheless, it is true that, along with the Baroque and all the other surviving subcultures, a group of young intellectuals, congregating mostly in Pest and led by Sándor Petőfi, uncompromisingly and militantly fought against all manifestations of feudal Hungary in the name of liberty and equality. They were hoping for a revolution and for Hungary to become a democratic republic. As a sign of changing times, one person, Mihály Táncsics, did stand socially apart from the group, but, at the same time, represented its most radical populist wing, to which Petőfi himself belonged. The son of serfs, Táncsics was partially an autodidact, but he also took advantage of secondary schools and even the university. He travelled in the west and became a prolific author. Táncsics was not only censored, but also jailed, and only as the result of the 1848 revolution was he set free.⁸⁹

The mid- and late 1840s also witnessed a proliferation of associations, journals, and social activities of all kinds. These cut both ways. That is, within individual associations, emphasis was placed on group solidarity and cohesion, but, by the same token, rivalries between them added to the already polarized atmosphere of the times. These rivalries became especially acute between fashion magazines, with politics

87 *Pesti Hírlap*, February 20, 1842; Rubin, *Auguste de Gerando*, 71–2; István Kováts, *Egy szegény pórfű önéletrajza* [The autobiography of a poor peasant boy] (Budapest, 1981), 31–2; Károly Vörös (ed.), *Francsics Károly: Kis kamorámban gyertyát gyújték* [Károly Francsics: I lit a candle in my small room] (Budapest, 1973), 141–7.

88 Ferenc Kulin, “A polgári nemzettudat kialakulása Magyarországon” [The emergence of bourgeois national consciousness in Hungary] in Mónika Víg (ed.), *Hogyan éljük túl a XX. századot?* [How are we going to survive the 20th century?] (Budapest, 1992), 231; Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, 308–9.

89 Pajkossy, *Polgári átalakulás és nyilvánosság a reformkorban*, 16; Robert Nemes, “Associations and civil society in reform-era Hungary,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 32 (2001), 27; Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, 311; Ágota Steinert (ed.), *Podmanický Frigyes. Egy régi gavallér emlékei* [Frigyes Podmaniczky: The memoirs of an old gentleman] (Budapest, 1984), 143; Robert Nemes, “The politics of the dance floor: Culture and civil society in nineteenth century Hungary,” *Slavic Review* 60, no. 4 (2001).

again intruding. The *Pesti Divatlap* was a left-liberal journal in sharp competition with *Honderű*, a conservative publication. In Pozsony, conservatives and liberals organized rival balls, and, in general, as Robert Nemes has pointed out, the dance floor itself grew into a display case of patriotic preferences, with Hungarian dress and dances ousting foreign fashions and dances alike.

The prevalent romanticism and sentimentalism of the era engendered a subjective tone that found its main outlets in diaries, filled with not only interesting tidbits about the period, but also intimate personal revelations. The Biedermeyer culture nourished this, in turn, with women as the primary participants in reading and enjoying romantic and sentimental literature, published both in books and in the popular fashion magazines. In fact, the latter would have not survived without their female readers.⁹⁰

Women had no political rights, except for a very few who could appoint delegates to diets to represent their aristocratic families. The revolutionary legislation of 1848 did not give them the right to vote, but, as Gábor Gyáni has argued, cultural transformations run ahead, at times, of political and legal changes. According to Robert Nemes, “in a period of great political and cultural agitation, a small number of women gained a precarious foothold in public life” in Hungary. The aristocratic Zichy sisters, who had become ardent supporters of Hungarian national causes, are important examples of this trend.⁹¹

Nationalists always appreciated women’s roles, as long as male nationalists were the ones to define and shape them. Women gave birth to males, and it was taken for granted that women’s impact on their sons would be critical. For this reason, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the need for women, as disseminators of knowledge to their children, to learn the Hungarian language. Countess Teréz Brunswick was a pioneer of kindergarten education, and, in 1846, two schools

90 György Szabad, “A szubjektív hang a reformkor politikai életében” [The subjective tone in the political life of the Age of Reform], *Ars Hungarica* 15, no. 1 (1987), 16–9; Gábor Gyáni, “Nők, nacionalizmus és az individualizálódás” [Women, nationalism, and individualism] in Zoltán Kovács and Levente Püski (eds.), *Emlékkönyv L. Nagy Zsuzsa 80. születésnapjára* [Memorial volume honoring Zsuzsa L. Nagy on her 80th birthday] (Debrecen, 2010), 88–90.

91 Gyáni, “Nők, nacionalizmus és individualizálódás,” 88–9; Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, 84, 96.

opened only for young women, one in Pest led by Countess Blanka Teleki and another in Miskolc, under the guidance of the veteran Teréz Karacs.

With few exceptions, however, women's equality in whatever shape or form was left unacknowledged. Even the democratic idol Sándor Petőfi was dismissive when he discussed what women should or should not do in a letter to Frigyes Kerényi. "They [the women] should cook in the kitchen and weed in the garden, but should trust men to do the work in the stables," he wrote. Generally, feelings for women ranged from openly contemptuous through the condescending. At the same time, women were also put on a pedestal and adored as objects of love and extolled in their roles as mothers-to-be, a common phenomenon in patriarchal cultures. An example of contempt was published in *Nemzeti Újság*, in which the author claimed that "the main cause for the misery of common people was the ignorance of women." By this, the author meant ignorance about how and what to cook. An article in the *Életképek* in 1845 presented another example of withering condescension. In that article, a certain Mokány praised women for their receptivity of what was good and nice in novels. But then he warned that those novels should be selected with care, because any damaging text could ruin women's "weak emotional life." After all, women did not have the sober and practical minds to resist the temptations of excessive imagination.⁹²

Conservatives stressed the need for women, along with everyone else, to be and to stay religious, the sole defense against "animal instincts and wickedness." Perhaps András Fáy best summarized the liberal consensus on women. "Women should be good wives, mothers and housekeepers," he wrote. "They should not engage in political and theoretical discussions, but they should bring up their children as patriots and should identify with the progress of their country."⁹³

92 Quoted in Anna Fábri (ed.), "*A szép tiltott táj felé.*" *A magyar írónők története a két századforduló között (1795–1905)* ["Towards the forbidden region": The history of Hungarian women writers between the two turn-of-the centuries (1795–1905)] (Budapest, 1996), 75; *Nemzeti Újság*, March 4, 1843; Fábri, "*A szép tiltott táj felé,*" 63–4.

93 *Nemzeti Újság*, March 4, 1843; quoted in Fábri, "*A szép tiltott táj felé,*" 70.

1847–48

This short period has been designated as the Vormärz, but only after the fact of the 1848 revolution was this term ever used. Those who lived then perhaps had premonitions, but there is no evidence that they had the idea that they were rushing headlong into a revolution. By this token, the memoirs of Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky are suspect. The then young liberal aristocrat remembered that time was speeding in the autumn of 1847. "No one cared for the present but [everyone] was concerned only about the future," he claimed in retrospect. What was credible in his memoirs, however, was his description of the great excitement that accompanied Kossuth's election as a delegate from Pest County to the forthcoming diet, because Pest County held a leading role in the country and Kossuth's election was of national, rather than of merely local, significance. For this very reason, the government had vainly done its utmost to thwart it. Széchenyi then arranged to be elected as well, but, as later events proved, he was no match for such a master politician as Kossuth.⁹⁴

The diet opened in November, 1847, and the government surprised everybody by promoting reforms on such issues as the *aviticitas*, the manumission of serfs, and penal reform. It is questionable how sincere and committed these efforts were, because, apart from passing the penal reform, the government truly wished only to modify the *aviticitas*. What it hoped was to design a strategy of dividing the liberal opposition, thereby neutralizing Kossuth. Indeed, a few liberal deputies, Menyhért Lónyay and Móricz Szentkirályi, for example, reached out to Vienna behind Kossuth's back. In addition, Deák, who again stayed away from the diet, this time because of illness, welcomed the government's overtures.

Kossuth was thus placed in a bind. However, in a master stroke, he abandoned a public discussion of the reform program, which, in more intransigent liberal eyes, was already tainted by the government's endorsements. Instead, Kossuth concentrated on attacking the system of administrators, using it as a patriotic grievance. In the meantime, individual reform proposals were being accepted in committees, including the obligatory manumission of serfs, the abolition of *aviticitas*, the

94 Steinert, *Podmaniczky Frigyes*, 225, 226–35; Gergely, 280.

privilege of tax exemption, and the establishment of a national bank. When the Upper Chamber accepted some of these proposals, negotiations between the two chambers began.⁹⁵

Such negotiations—haggling may be a more accurate word—used to seem endless and frequently led to dead ends. This well-known scenario assumed that everybody around the negotiating table played according to the customary rules. Kossuth decided not to do so. Prepared to abandon his previous gradualist approach and to launch a major attack on the government, he refused, in a major speech in December, to respond to the negative message that the Upper Chamber had sent, which should have led to further negotiations. Instead, defying traditional procedure, Kossuth now wished to send each individual grievance to the king, a sign of how the anti-absolutist struggle had matured.⁹⁶

In the meantime and shortly thereafter, rumblings from other parts of Europe reached Pozsony. Bad harvests and subsequent hunger, financial insolvency of governments, and just plain dissatisfaction with the *status quo* led to demonstrations and heightened tensions especially in Italy, Germany, and France. In France, the regime of King Louis Philippe was overthrown in February 1848, and a republic was proclaimed. The revolutionary wave reached Vienna in March, when Metternich was forced to resign. This news from Vienna sparked a demonstration in Pest on March 15, when Petőfi and his friends defied censorship and published his famous “National song” and the demands of the Hungarian people in twelve points. The government in Vienna consented to the formation of a Hungarian government with Lajos Batthyány as prime minister and with Kossuth, Deák, Eötvös, and Széchenyi all becoming cabinet members.

On April 11, 1848, the king sanctioned the so-called April Laws. Hungary was essentially declared independent, with only the person of the monarch and the conduct of foreign affairs and joint defense linked to Austria, although many issues, including the one about joint finances, were left undecided. The serfs were emancipated, *avíticitas*

95 Szekfű, *Rövid magyar történet*, 330; January 4, 2011, Gábor Pajkossy's letter to the author; Deák and Molnár, *Deák Ferenc*, 72.

96 Pajkossy, “A reformkor (1830–1848),” 243–4.

and censorship were abolished, Transylvania was reunited with Hungary, and all the Christian churches became equal, at least in theory. A few vestiges of the “old” system were retained. For example, the emancipation of Jews was postponed because resistance was expected mostly from German inhabitants of towns.

Nevertheless, the liberal triumph appeared nearly complete. Feudal Hungary had supposedly ceased to exist, and a new chapter in Hungarian history was about to begin.

Epilogue

Hungary's "Age of Reform" has had a glowing reputation in the Hungarian public mind for good reason. Only faulty revisionism would deny the presence of undeniable idealism, fuelled by romanticism that seemed virtually boundless. Mostly young noblemen, who were both intellectually and emotionally attached to liberal idealism, believed in the coming of a "perfect society." They worked toward the day when liberty and progress would triumph over the forces of backwardness and retrogression, although the optimism sparked by this idealism never did succeed in overcoming longstanding, dark shadows of national gloom. National disasters in Hungary's past, a sense of backwardness *vis-à-vis* the west, and the feeling of being surrounded and threatened, especially by Slavs, kept undermining liberal optimism.

It had been, in fact, easier and more comfortable to be anchored to an "*extra Hungariam non est vita*" form of conservatism, in which tradition and old customs were extolled and regarded as the best of possible worlds, needing, at most, minor modifications. Therefore, the progress of liberalism in Hungary was a slow, uneven, and halting process. Only in the 1840s did liberals become a major political force.

Although concrete reasons accounted for the relatively slow and incomplete emergence of Hungarian liberalism, this situation was by no means unique in Europe. Reality did not so much undermine liberal faith as it complicated its trajectory by throwing up multiple obstacles on the path to anything resembling fulfillment of liberal aims. This could not have been otherwise. Although Clifford Geertz was most likely thinking of Indonesia, his chosen area of research, his comments on transition from the traditional to modern certainly apply to Hungary in the first decades of the nineteenth century. "There is no simple progression from 'traditional' to 'modern,'" Geertz wrote, "but a twisting, spasmodic, unmethodical movement which turns as often to repossessing the emotions of the past as disowning them." Robert Tombs, writing about the period between 1814 and 1848, echoed this view when he stated that "Europe was struggling to rebuild viable political systems in the face of hatreds, jealousies, fears of further upheaval,

hopes of new revolutionary triumphs, and divided loyalties between rival authorities and ideologies." Even the usually optimistic Kossuth stated in 1841 that "the historian will find that [our] period is marked by painful metamorphoses."¹

The Hungarian Age of Reform was, therefore, for all its glitter and occasional brilliance, a complicated historical period. When confronted with these complications, both latter-day historians and also contemporaries have resorted to attempts at simplifying the past. Count István Széchenyi wanted to turn a new page in Hungarian history by ignoring this troubled past and, instead, to concentrate on spiritual and material renewal. The centralists pursued a similar scheme and entertained the illusion of transplanting the most advanced western political system to Hungary. Neither of these simplifications worked. The bulk of Hungarian liberals and their leaders, Kölcsey, Wesselényi, Deák, and Kossuth, were too deeply involved in Hungarian realities to fall for any kind of simplification. They struggled against not only Vienna and their conservative Hungarian rivals, but also their own fears and self-doubts, as they confronted other Hungarian realities. These included dealing with a welter of sometimes reassuring but sometimes threatening cultural influences, a rigidly stratified hierarchical society, and a deeply entrenched feudal mentality.

Indeed, it would have been totally unrealistic to expect that this heritage would not continue to exert a very strong impact on historical periods subsequent to the Age of Reform. While Hungary broke radically with its past during the 1848 Revolution and the 1849 War of Independence, when serfdom was abolished, for example, and national independence was declared, those brief years were simultaneously intensely exhilarating and quite confusing. Old conflicts were exposed without any chance of reaching a solution. According to István Deák, the contours of the later 1867 "Compromise," *de facto* independence of two states with joint Austrian and Hungarian responsibility for foreign and military affairs, already existed in 1848, "but in 1848 neither side took that kind of [potential] cooperation seriously."

Baron József Eötvös, as Minister of Religion and Education, introduced a bill in 1848 that made education obligatory and free. The tenth

1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 319; Robert Tombs, "Politics" in Blanning, *The Nineteenth Century*, 13; Kossuth, *Felelet*, 1.

paragraph of this bill allowed for using a non-Magyar language of instruction for pupils who did not understand Hungarian. It was mostly his fellow liberals who bitterly attacked Eötvös, and he backtracked at the end. He clearly held a minority position, while Kossuth represented the majority. "The Hungarian liberals were unable to fathom the depth of national sentiments among the non-Magyars," wrote István Deák, adding, "why should collective privileges be bestowed on a specific nationality, shortly after all corporate and caste privileges had been abolished?" Kossuth himself told a Serbian delegation on April 8, 1848 that "the unity of the country makes it indispensable for the language of public affairs to be the Magyar language."² The consequences of this stance were tragic. During the War of Independence, Hungarians had to fight not only the Austrians but also Croats, Serbs, and Romanians.

No democratic transformation followed the dismantling of feudalism, and none had been promised. The suffrage in the new parliamentary representative system was restrictive, but it was not out of line with what was customary in Europe at the time. To vote, one had to possess some wealth and education, and roughly between one-third and one-fourth of the male population qualified. Nor was the peasant policy of the government altogether successful from the former serfs' point of view. Peasants had obtained only about one-third of the arable land by the end of 1848.

However, by that time, the issue of national defense was taking priority over any other issue. Kossuth's triumphant recruiting tour among the peasants, especially on the Plains, had brought tens of thousands into the new Hungarian Army and established what had become a powerful emotional link between Kossuth and the people, who for a long time celebrated him "as our father Kossuth." In this sense, Kossuth did put into practice the liberal idea of "identity of interests."³

All avenues of possible reconciliation between Austria and Hungary seemed to have been closed in the spring of 1849. Vienna imposed the so-called Olmütz constitution on the Monarchy, which reintroduced severe centralization and dismembered Hungary to the point that

2 January 6, 2011, letter of István Deák to the author; Schlett, *Eötvös József*, 132–3; quoted in István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 122.

3 András Gergely, "A forradalom és az önvédelmi háború (1848–1849)" [The revolution and defensive war (1848–1849)] in Gergely, *19. századi magyar történelem 1790–1918*, 260; Kosáry, 234–5; Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 170.

displeased even the conservatives. Kossuth, reacting to this move and hoping to enhance Hungary's international standing, led a national assembly in dethroning the Habsburg dynasty and declaring Hungary's independence on April 14, 1849.

This was followed by a string of military victories over Austria. In desperation, the young emperor, Francis Joseph, asked for Russian help. Tsar Nicholas I gladly complied. Against such overwhelming odds, the Hungarian army had no chance, and it surrendered in August, 1849. Kossuth, along with many others, escaped abroad, and Austria exacted severe retributions. In time, however, Hungarians turned this defeat into a victory, a syndrome quite common in history, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch has demonstrated in his analysis of several outstanding historical examples of this phenomenon.⁴ In Hungary, "1848/1849 had brought history in its most glorious and glorifiable form close to the present. Defeat by the joint efforts of two great powers was no shame; on the contrary, the very urgency of their hasty alliance reinforced Hungarian pride."⁵

By 1866, conditions were changing as Austria, following its defeat by Prussia, grew weaker. On the Hungarian side, Ferenc Deák was instrumental in working for a rapprochement with Austria. The resulting Compromise of 1867, which established two states, side by side, with joint responsibilities, possessed a certain structural coherence, and this arrangement of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy continued until 1918. However, it failed to bridge the deep cultural divide between the two countries. Although Austria became a constitutional country, bureaucratic and following, at least theoretically, the principle of staying neutral in matters of nationality, "Magyar nationalists, reinforced by the memories of 1848–1849, had never shaken off their compulsive predilection for external reassurances and symbols. This romantic heritage virtually guaranteed that the aspirations of a great number of Hungarians ... could never be fully satisfied as long as the Monarchy lasted."⁶

Even if Austria had been prepared to offer substantial concessions, as it usually was not, nothing short of full independence would have satisfied those who maintained the 48-er mentality in Hungary. At the

4 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (London, 2004).

5 Gábor Vermes, *István Tisza: The Liberal Vision and Conservative Statecraft of a Magyar Nationalist* (New York, 1985), 10.

6 *Ibid.*, 24–5.

end, they themselves did not actually want full independence, because they welcomed the protection that the Monarchy's great power status accorded to Hungary.

Feudalism in a legal sense had been abolished in 1848, but feudal habits and customs survived, and Hungarian society remained essentially hierarchical. The country's liberal heritage was reverently worshipped, and the Parliament was the center of political life. Nevertheless, George Schöpfli's statement that "the system was... guided by the power elite, which tended to regard constitutional and legal procedures as an inconvenience and façade, behind which it was free to defend its positions and interests" contains a great deal of truth. This power elite was Hungary's "land-owning nobility," and neither rapid social changes nor reforms undermined its dominance. "Politics has always been a preserve of the elite, of 'our masters,'"⁷ according to Mihály Vajda. In an unspoken division of labor, mostly Jews took charge of the country's spectacularly rapid economic development. Budapest grew from a sleepy provincial town into a glittering metropolis in a few decades.

The transition from traditional to modern times was also marked by different conceptions of time. "Whereas medieval time seems thoroughly imbued with religious meanings and issues, modern time appears more linked to technology."⁸ In traditional societies, time mattered much less than later, when it could be measured. The 1830s and 1840s in Hungary represented a transitional state between the two. László Bártfay was a central figure among the country's intellectuals in the thick of social interactions, and he simultaneously did many things and needed to reconcile multiple tasks. We know from his diary that he was often glancing at his watch, which was no longer, by then, a luxury item.⁹

7 George Schöpfli, "The political traditions of Eastern Europe," *Daedalus* (Winter 1990), 63; László Péter, "The aristocracy, the gentry and their parliamentary tradition in nineteenth-century Hungary," *Slavonic and East European Review* 70, no. 1 (1992), 81, 85; Mihály Vajda, "East-Central European perspectives" in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State* (London, 1988), 340.

8 Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest–New York, 2008), 8. See also E.P. Thompson, "Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism," *Past and Present* (1967), 56–97.

9 Zsuzsa Kalla, "'Kellemetes társalkodású s nem üres beszédű ember.' Bártfay László naplója" ["A pleasant conversationalist and not a windbag." The diary of László Bártfay], *Budapesti Negyed* 46, no. 4 (2004), 211–38.

Such a seemingly minor detail symbolizes a larger issue. All the reformers from Széchenyi through Kossuth, Eötvös, and others hoped for the evolution of a unified Hungarian middle class to become the principal motor of progress in Hungary and the means whereby modernization, though they did not use that term, would take root. For all the continuing exhortations during the Dualist Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this kind of unity only sporadically materialized. The untitled nobility, which became known as the gentry, followed the line of least resistance and slid into a zone of comfort, in which its members tried to preserve traditional Hungarian culture and, by and large, maintained their hostility to big cities and to mostly everything modern. Count István Tisza became the all-powerful prime minister of the country in the early part of the twentieth century. He was thereby compelled to stay a great deal of the time in Budapest, but he felt uncomfortable there, lambasted its coffeehouses as frivolous places, and seized any opportunity to rush back home by train to Geszt, his beloved ancestral home, a village in Bihar County.¹⁰ This attitude, multiplied by the tens of thousands, was significant. The Hungarian sub-cultures—the feudal attachment to a sense of permanence, the classical devotion to the ancients, the Baroque, the Biedermeyer, the Catholic and Protestant, and various ethnic sub-cultures—all survived, joined by two new ones that emerged early in the twentieth century, the radical bourgeois and the social democratic. As social and economic changes were accelerating, the gap between the urban primarily Jewish beneficiaries of those changes and the country's political elite, largely living in a pre-industrial time, widened.

What, if anything, linked all the disparate parts of this society together? The answer to this question is nationalism, which was fervently propagated in the schools, press, and the ranks of the Honvéd, the Hungarian branch of the Army. Intense as this nationalism was, it did fluctuate to some degree. It had its highs when Kossuth was buried in Budapest in 1894 and, again, in the summer of 1914, but it never diminished the country's sharp class and cultural differences or its ethnic and confessional divisions. Striking distinctions remained, reflected even in how people were addressed in the Hungarian language, between *úr* and *paraszt*, gentleman and peasant.

10 Vermes, *István Tisza*, 164–5.

What mattered more was the exact nature of this nationalism. Ever since the trials and tribulations of the sixteenth century, dark shadows and bright lights had alternated in interpretations of the nation's history. These double messages signaled widespread fears, a sense of defeat, and anticipations of annihilation, all of which co-existed with a robust self-image of unparalleled heroism and survival against heavy odds. The emergence of romantic nationalism in the nineteenth century, among both the Magyars and non-Magys, as well as the impact that Russia was presumed to have on the Slavs and Romanians in Hungary, deepened this intense emotional bifurcation. Compensation for a strong sense of feeling threatened led to and fuelled the idea of "Magyar supremacy," an idea of nationalistic excess, mitigated only by the adherence to the country's constitutional and liberal heritage.

A particular culture evolved, which Alyson M. Cole in a different context called "the cult of true victimhood."¹¹ It is possible to chart its course during the Age of Dualism. Whenever Russia became active in the affairs of the Balkans, nervousness grew in Hungary, bringing forth customary compensatory measures. In the 1870s, a virtual anti-Pan-Slav hysteria was raging in the Slovak-inhabited counties, followed by reinforced magyarization efforts around 1908, and, most blatantly, by excesses in 1914–15 in Serbia, when it was occupied by the Monarchy's Army.

Nationalist fear and anxiety and nationalist bravado were two sides of the same coin. This particular culture was by definition extremely self-absorbed, which was flamboyantly demonstrated in 1896 when Hungary celebrated its thousand-year existence. A book by Zsolt Beöthy was designed to justify Hungarian hegemony over the non-Magyar nationalities by claiming a thousand-year continuity and superiority of Hungarian culture.¹² The consequences of this collective self-absorption were very serious: "We carried on with politicking," Count Kunó Klebelsberg reminisced about the pre-1914 times, "as if we had lived on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Very few people could

11 Alyson M. Cole, *The Cult of True Victimhood* (Stanford, 2007).

12 Zsolt Beöthy, *A magyar irodalom kis-tükre* [The small mirror of Hungarian literature] (Budapest, 1896); Péter Dávidházi, "'A múlt hatalmunknak egyik eleme.' Az irodalomtörténet használata Toldy jelégéje óta" ["The past is one element of our power." The use of literary history since Toldy's motto] in Lahdelma et al. (eds.), *Power and Culture*, 26–7.

see beyond Vienna. There was a great deal of incredible naiveté in judging foreign affairs.”¹³

Wallowing in victimhood generated a justification for not caring about the opinions of others, thereby leading to isolation, a source of both open pride and concealed despair. After the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I, the devastating Treaty of Trianon dismembered Hungary. The resulting substantial losses of territories and people immeasurably aggravated and deepened Hungary’s attachment to a sense of victimhood.

This sense has deep roots in Hungarian history and was far from absent during the Age of Reform. At the same time, that period was also the source of positive ideas for improving both the cultural and political circumstances of a country which lagged considerably behind developments in Western Europe. The concept of liberty was central, as were, especially for the liberals, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, and, at least in principle, the dignity of each individual, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social status. Conservatives, except for the most extreme among them, slowly came to agree, at least partially, with some of these propositions. The sharp political polarization between liberals and conservatives in the 1840s may make us forget how many ties, both personal and political, connected members of the country’s elite to each other throughout most of this period, illustrating the point that Sir Isaiah Berlin made when he approvingly wrote about “a plurality of ideals, cultures and temperaments.”¹⁴

Hungarian society exemplified this ideal during the Age of Reform, but a sanitized depiction of this complicated age became the accepted version. In fact, the strength and vitality embedded in pluralism should be the most enduring legacy of this fascinating and tumultuous period in Hungarian history.

13 Count Kunó Klebelsberg, *Beszédei, cikkei és törvényjavaslatai* [His speeches, articles, and bills] (Budapest, 1927), 670.

14 Isaiah Berlin, *The Power of Ideas* (Princeton, 2002; first published in the United Kingdom in 2000), 7–9, 11–4. While Berlin remained a committed liberal, he also praised conservative thinkers, such as Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder.

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